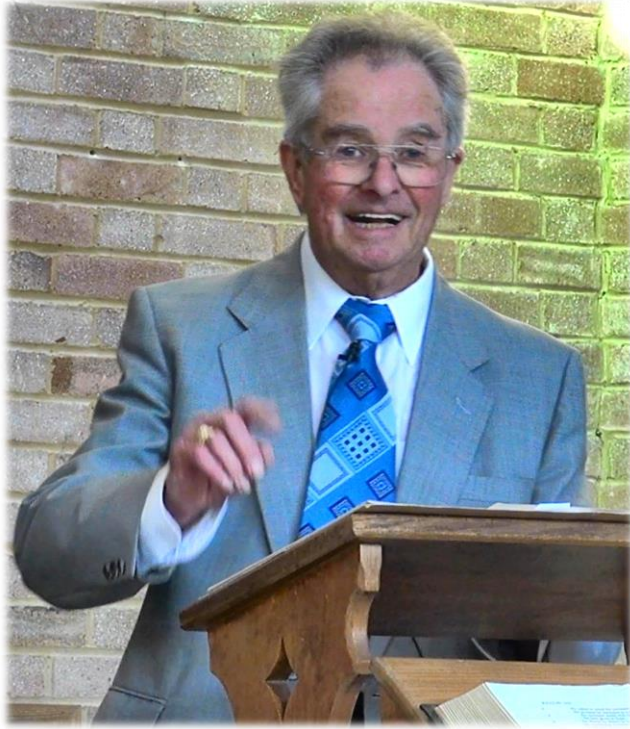


Morning Service Sunday 24th May – led by Pastor Peter Gooch



The theme of the day was the coming of the Holy Spirit, but it was ‘gremlins’ that appeared to rule the day with the sound system and projection of the hymns. After we’d sung Happy Birthday to Stephen, our Director of Music, the sound system tried to drown Peter out with crackles and bangs. He seemed remarkably unfazed by it all. And we all coped with singing the words on the screen (as we’d been told to) whilst these changed repeatedly mid-verse. Ah well....

The coming of the Holy Spirit was central to Christian life, Pastor Peter told us. As John Stott had observed, Christian discipleship would be inconceivable—indeed impossible—without the Holy Spirit. There could be no life without the life-giver, no understanding without the Spirit of truth, no fellowship without the unity of the Spirit, no Christlike character without his fruit, and no effective witness without his power. Just as a body without breath is a corpse, so the church without the Spirit of God would be dead.

At the beginning of Luke’s Gospel, the Holy Spirit had descended upon Jesus at his baptism. As Jesus entered his public ministry, he was full of the Holy Spirit, led by the Spirit, empowered by the Spirit, and anointed by the Spirit. Then, at the beginning of Luke’s second volume, Acts, the same Holy Spirit had come upon the disciples at Pentecost to equip them for God’s mission in the world. In this sense, Pentecost was the crowning act of Jesus’ saving work before his return: Jesus was born into our humanity, lived among us, died for our sins, rose from the dead, ascended into heaven, and then poured out the Holy Spirit on his people.

Pentecost also marked a new era. In the Old Testament, the Spirit had come upon particular people for particular tasks. Now the Spirit was given to all who came to Christ. The apostles had been equipped for their calling as witnesses, and the church had been launched into its worldwide mission.

Luke had described three striking signs at Pentecost:

- A sound like a rushing wind, pointing to the breath of God and the coming of the Spirit.
- What seemed to be tongues of fire, suggesting God’s holy and purifying presence.
- Speech in many languages, showing that the message of Christ is for all peoples.

These signs had awakened the crowd and prepared the way for (apostle) Peter’s sermon. His message had focused on Jesus. He’d spoken first about the events of the gospel: Jesus’ life, death, resurrection, and exaltation. Jesus of Nazareth had been truly human, yet he’d been accredited by God through mighty works, wonders, and signs. Peter had then turned to the cross. Jesus had been handed over to wicked men and crucified, yet this was not outside God’s purpose. His death had been a victory not a defeat - part of God’s saving plan. Through the death of his Son, God was accomplishing salvation for sinners. But death could not hold Jesus. God had raised him from the dead, reversing the verdict of men and exalting him to the highest place. The resurrection had been not only victory over death; it had been God’s declaration that Jesus was Lord.

Peter had supported his message with two witnesses:

- The Old Testament Scriptures, which pointed forward to Christ.
- The apostles, who were eyewitnesses of Jesus’ life, death, resurrection, and ascension.

Peter had shown that the Psalms and the prophets had found their fulfilment in Jesus. David’s words could not refer to himself, for David died and was buried; they pointed ahead to the risen Christ. In the same way, Scripture as a whole bore witness to Jesus. The apostles confirmed this testimony because they had seen these things with their own eyes. Together, Scripture and eyewitness testimony proclaimed the truth of Christ’s resurrection and reign.

Peter had not only spoken about what Jesus had done; he’d also spoken about what Jesus now offered. To those who respond to him, Christ promised:

- Forgiveness of sins.
- The gift of the Holy Spirit.

These gifts brought true freedom: freedom from guilt, defilement, judgment, and self-centredness, and freedom to become the people God had created us to be.

Peter had also made it clear that the gospel called for a response. Those who'd heard him were cut to the heart and asked, "What shall we do?" His answer was simple and urgent: repent, believe, and be baptised.

To repent was to turn from sin and self-rule and to turn towards God. It was to leave behind the life in which self sat in the driving seat and to submit instead to the rule of Christ. Baptism was the public sign of that new allegiance and of belonging to the people of Jesus.

And as Pastor Peter told us, the offer of salvation was open to all. Everyone who called on the name of the Lord would be saved. God placed no limit on those who could come to him in faith.

On the day of Pentecost, about three thousand people had responded to this message. The church's task today was still to proclaim those same truths with clarity, courage, and dependence on the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit had come on that day—and still brought life, power, conviction, and hope to God's people today.

