

## Sermon by Rev David Thiem

9am at St Aidan's – 1<sup>st</sup> May 2016 – 6<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Easter

Theme: “The gift of the Holy Spirit”

Reading: John 14:23-29 ‘Jesus promises to send his disciples the Holy Spirit’.

### Introduction

Last Sunday we heard Jesus’ command to love, even to love those that we struggle to like! It’s a tall order to love those that hate us, those who have a grudge against us, those we don’t relate to or even those who are so different to us that we have no desire to be around them. Jesus somehow has a way to make us feel challenged in our dealings with others especially when we want to avoid certain people. Jesus reminds us to love our neighbour as ourselves, to love others as God loves us – what a challenge!!

Thus it is important to recognize in today’s Gospel a promise of a very specific, utterly essential gift that Jesus offers to the disciples and thus to us.

Jesus says,

“The Companion, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything and will remind you of everything I told you.”

That says to me that Jesus doesn’t expect us to obey him, to live a life of discipleship, to love others as he has loved us without some external help. The name for that help is the ‘Holy Spirit’ or as Jesus speaks of the Holy Spirit here in John’s Gospel, ‘The Companion’ sometimes also translated as ‘Counsellor’, ‘Comforter’ or ‘Advocate’.

During the week Annette and I had a good friend around, unexpectedly, for a meal. During the discussions over the meal, our friend said, one of the things I love about the Christian faith is that we are not expected to do it all by ourselves. We have a Christian community, we have the witness of Christ and we have the strength of the Holy Spirit. We are never alone. This was a person who had experienced deep personal pain and loss and yet knew the beauty and strength of ‘the Companion’, the ‘Comforter’ that Christ here offers the disciples. This passage is one often read at funerals, because it offers hope beyond ourselves and a strength and love in our time of need which is not reliant on ourselves but transcends our humanity and offers us a God given hope.

### The Text – John 14:23-29

The setting of the Gospel reading is worth remembering as we reflect on this passage. The disciples were despairing about Jesus talking of his imminent death and them being left alone. Here Jesus encourages the disciples by promising them what they need into the future. He will give them the Holy Spirit, the same Spirit that inspired him to preach in Nazareth, the same Spirit that saw him drive the money changers out of the temple, the same Spirit that enabled him to stand up courageously to the authorities and supported him in his last hours of agony on the cross. This is the Spirit that he now dares to bestow upon his disciples.

Today's Gospel reminds us that Jesus doesn't expect any of us to be Christian by ourselves. He gives us the help we need to be faithful, an Advocate who will stand up for us and who will remind us about things we might too easily forget.

Jesus orders us to be courageous in our living, to love each other, to pray for our enemies and to take up the cross and follow him.

However he does not expect us to do these demanding tasks or to live and to die by ourselves. Christ gives us what we need to be what he calls us to be. Thus you will note that the church prays for the gift of the Holy Spirit (*epiclesis*) every time we meet as a community of faith, as we baptize, as we share Holy Communion and often at the beginning of services. We know that we cannot pray as we ought, enjoy the peace of Christ, or be the body of Christ in motion as we ought except through the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Little in the Christian faith is self-derived. None of it can be accomplished on our own.

Without the empowering and prodding of the Holy Spirit, the church is in danger of becoming just another well-meaning, sometimes helpful, human organization. We need to remember that our Christian faith differentiates us from non-Christians and the gift of the Holy Spirit is one thing that sets apart us as Christians. The reliance on God's good gifts to us through Christ and the Holy Spirit is part and parcel of our faith.

The other aspect that stands out for me in this brief passage is verse 27:

“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.”

This chapter of John began with “***Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust in me.***” John 14:1

Jesus has picked up the troubled hearts of the disciples, that things are not going as they thought they would and they are worried about the future. Part of John 14 and part of the gift of the Holy Spirit is that true peace only comes as we allow God to work through us and as we give ourselves over to God. This serenity, this peace does not come from any worldliness but only through a close relationship with Jesus as our Lord and Saviour and trusting in his way. Not easy for any of us to do this. However, again we are offered the Holy Spirit as ‘Comforter’ and part of this ‘comforting’ role is to give a sense of peace, an acceptance that we are in the hands of God and all will work out. This is not fatalism, but rather faith. This peace is a sense of total well-being and inner rest of spirit, in fellowship with God. This is the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

### Conclusion

We are two weeks out from celebrating the Day of Pentecost when we remember the Holy Spirit coming upon the early church community. Today's Gospel reminds us both of the importance of the Holy Spirit and part of the role of the Holy Spirit, encouraging us not to rely on self but on the power of the Spirit to help us be the people God calls us to be. And so we say ‘Come Holy Spirit, come!’

Amen