

Hinde Street Methodist Church
Sunday 5 June 2022
11:30am Rev Peter Cornick

The Spirit – known by keeping Jesus’ commandments

*The day of Pentecost
and the occasion of the Platinum Jubilee of HM the Queen.*

‘If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you for ever. John 14: 15-16

Keeping commandments

The Queen, in 1975, said:

[Jesus] commanded us to love our neighbours as we love ourselves, but what exactly is meant by ‘loving ourselves’? I believe it means trying to make the most of the abilities we have been given, it means caring for our talents. It is a matter of making the best of ourselves, not just doing the best for ourselves.¹

William Shawcross writes, that for the Queen, ‘Two things stand out – the Queen’s constant sense of duty and her devotion to God.’² Seventy years is a long time to perform any role – not least one which you did not expect to be yours, or so soon. Seventy years of duty and devotion to God.

Whilst many will enjoy street parties or line The Mall, I realise some will be uncomfortable with royalty and privilege; an accident of birth does not speak of meritocracy; others will be uncomfortable with the connection to the military. We will all have our views. Of course, we are now witnesses to a country that disposed of its monarchy just over 100 years ago, and has a President who has dispensed with democracy and rivals the worst of historic despotic monarchs. No system is without its failings.

But this is the moment to recognise that one woman has carried out what her country has given her to do – her duty – her calling if you like – with remarkable dedication. In her address on her 21st birthday, she devoted herself to service. Whether opening hospitals or visiting the survivors of disasters, duty in service has been her life’s work. She cannot offer a political solution to situations she visits, but she can offer the best of herself for others. But, as Shawcross observes out, she has not failed to point to God as the source of her strength – the means by which she carries out her duty. She has done this, it might be said, whilst also supporting and advocating every other faith. In 2002, the Queen said:

I know just how much I rely on my faith to guide me through the good times and the bad ... I draw strength from the message of hope in the Christian gospel.³

The Queen says, loving ourselves means to make the best of our abilities and talents. As we do so, we serve others. As we serve others, we keep Jesus’ commandment. The Queen’s

¹ Catherine Butcher and Mark Greene, *The Servant Queen*, 2016 p49

² Ibid, p2

³ Ibid, p6

duty and devotion have enabled her to keep Jesus' commandments for 70 years. Quite an achievement for anyone.

The Spirit at Pentecost

But this homily is not about the Queen – I offer you no horse racing metaphors. This homily is about the Holy Spirit, who descended on the bemused disciples, following the resurrection. The connection to the Queen is, that through duty and devotion – she is an example of someone keeping Jesus' commandments. And I want to suggest that in keeping Jesus' commandments, there is an equality between the Queen and you and I, for in keeping Jesus' commandments, we experience the Holy Spirit in our lives.

We heard two presentations of the gift of the Spirit.

First, the familiar words from Acts – a violent wind; tongues of fire; speaking in languages formally unknown to communicate God's message.

I don't know about you, but whilst that passage from Acts is a great story, I find the experience somewhat remote from my experience. Where is the violent wind, or the tongues of fire in my life – in my ministry? Why can the Spirit not translate my words into another language – Mandarin for example – which would have been useful yesterday when I judged the King's Cross 'Dumpling Competition' – it's not just the Queen who has such duty to perform!

Some churches place great store in the Spirit, and there is a tendency for us to think, we are just not trying hard enough when it comes to the Spirit, or we just haven't understood the Spirit. If only we could recover John Wesley's strangely warmed heart.

But, the second passage, from John, is a wholly different expression of the gift of the Spirit. And I think, rather encouraging.

This passage from John can end up being a bit convoluted – who dwells in who and who do we dwell in? It all gets a bit hard to understand. And yet, it comes down to who keeps the commandments.

Philip, asks Jesus, 'Show us the Father.' To which Jesus, probably with more frustration than the Gospel lets on, says to Philip, if you're looking at me and the things I've done, including my crucifixion and resurrection yet to come, you have seen the Father. In other words, if you want to see God – look no further than Jesus.

But Jesus is aware he cannot always be here in person. He is human and therefore mortal. How then will those to come – us – see God? How will God be with us, if not in human flesh?

Jesus promises the Holy Spirit.

Who then will receive the Spirit? What sort of Christian do you need to be? Is it a problem that I haven't noticed a violent wind or tongues of fire or spoken in strange tongues in my life?

'If you love me, you will keep my commandments' says Jesus, and then, 'I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate [by which he means the Holy Spirit], to be with you for ever.'

I am greatly encouraged by John's Gospel today, because if I keep the commandments of Jesus – to love my neighbour as myself, if I try and make the best of my abilities and talents in the service of others, I will be loving Jesus – loving God. And so, whether I am monarch or minister or whatever role you see yourself as having, the Spirit will be given – the Spirit of truth, which the world cannot understand or know, because the Spirit comes to those who live and love through Jesus, and keep his commands.

The Spirit at work in our lives

The Spirit, says Jesus a little later in the Gospel, *reminds* us of all that Jesus said and taught. 'Show us the Father' is Philip's plea. Well, look at Jesus and you will see. Look at the Spirit, and you will see – you will be reminded of Jesus – reminded of those commands.

But, the Spirit is notoriously difficult to pin down, to see. Earlier in John, Jesus tells Nicodemus the Spirit is like a wind which blows where it pleases. Can we notice the Spirit at work in our lives?

I want to ask Deacon Belinda to describe to us, her work last Wednesday on the steps of this very church. I think it describes to us, both the intangible and unexpected blowing of the Spirit, and allows us to see Jesus' commands to love and serve our neighbour.

Conversation with Belinda.

... which described offering tea and conversation to passers by on the Hinde Street steps. Belinda relayed several surprising conversations with people, which talked about God, and commented on the Holy Spirit enabling the work, the conversations, and the unexpected nature of the encounters. Belinda noted that in offering this service, the Holy Spirit both encouraged and reminded her of Jesus, and so, hid commands were carried out.

Conclusion

Philip asks, 'show us the Father', and is shown Jesus – we have seen the Spirit, and are reminded of Jesus.

None of this is possible, unless we love Jesus. None of this is possible unless the Spirit, promised by Jesus lives in us. And this becomes a reality when we keep his commandments.

The Queen, writing in 2016, remembers the 'triumphs and tragedies' during her life; the commandments she promised to keep.

I have been – and remain – very grateful to you for your prayers and to God for His steadfast love. I have indeed seen his faithfulness.⁴

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⁴ Ibid, Foreword