

# Bearing the fruits of the Holy Spirit in our lives

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Pentecost – Acts 2 1-21 Ps 104 26-36 1 Cor 12 4-13 Jn 20 19-23

We don't talk much about the Holy Spirit. We talk about what Jesus did and said, we talk about Christian values like justice, mercy and faith. We talk about scripture, ethics – lots of things, but we don't say much about how the Holy Spirit fits in. So how would you and I recognise the Holy Spirit if we bumped into each other? If we're not sure we could recognise the Spirit, how might we learn to do so reliably?

They say you can never quite catch the Holy Spirit, but you can always tell where she's been. So maybe that's a good place to start; like a careful tracker, let's look for signs that she's been with us. Those tracks will leave these characteristic marks in people: love and joy, peace and patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Gal 5:22-23

I've come across clear tracks this week talking with someone who is generous enough to feel deep, true gratitude, despite the terrible suffering their life has brought them. Gratitude is a generous gift to everyone around such a person. And then there was another person who's been terribly wronged and injured, but who doesn't seek revenge, but rather chooses the healing path of forgiveness and love. These are clear tracks to show that the Holy Spirit is at work in these people, and through them, offering astonishing gifts to all of us.

These people have been free to make their own choices. If their choices tend towards these things – love and joy, peace

and patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control – then we see evidence of the Spirit's involvement. But they are choices; always. The choice is to follow the guidance of the Spirit calling from within us, or to choose a different path. It's often a costly, tentative choice. And often too, one we can only really evaluate in hindsight. You may know how the poet, Robert Frost, ended his poem, *The road not taken*, 'I chose the path less travelled by, and that has made all the difference.' There's a huge difference in a life that chooses the trajectory of the Spirit towards love and joy, peace and patience – so different from a life that turns its back on kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

In today's epistle, Paul writes about this sort of choice to the church in Corinth. They were a church whose gatherings were plagued by issues of class distinction and spiritual one-upmanship. Paul urges them stop this. It would have been a very counter-cultural choice for them to make in their cosmopolitan, nouveau-rich city. On the subject of spiritual one-upmanship, Paul argues that spiritual growth isn't about the ambition or importance of the person manifesting a spiritual gift. Spiritual gifts are given for the common good; not as a status symbol. The Holy Spirit is the source of all spiritual gifts; and they are given 'as the Spirit chooses'.

There are two other things Paul writes about in today's epistle reading that help us learn how to follow the leading of the Holy Spirit: first about us being the body of Christ, and second about our baptism.

First, as the body of Christ, our call is to be filled with the Spirit, just as Jesus was. Rowan Williams writes about how Jesus was so utterly filled with the Spirit of God that he was the physical embodiment of the Wisdom, the Word and the Love of God. It meant all he did and said brought people face to face with God. And that's our calling too; we are now Christ's body, his hands, his feet, and his voice for the world now.

Paul obviously felt that the Corinthian church had work to do on that front. We do too! It's a process for each of us as individuals and all of us as a congregation, as a denomination and as the national and worldwide Church – are we embodying Jesus? Does the world encounter the Holy Spirit through us? The opposite or a counterfeit can be dreadful! (*The graffiti on the sacred Mt Beerwah QLD*

<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2023-05-26/mt-beerwah-vandalism/102397546> saying 'Jesus saves, just ask him') Whether it was a Christian or someone pretending to be doesn't matter: it's the harm done that is so shocking.

The process of developing the gifts of the Holy Spirit for each one of us is inaugurated at our baptism – and that's the other thing Paul mentioned. Our baptism is new birth into resurrection life. It's when we acknowledge that the Holy Spirit has come to live within us, at the centre of our being. We can encourage each other to follow the Spirit's guidance within us; recognise and name the Spirit's fruits when we see them.

What's the Spirit doing in there, inside us? Paul writes that the Holy Spirit, living in us, perceives the deepest needs of our hearts – needs we may not yet know of; needs we have no words to express. From inside us, the Spirit offers those needs in prayer for us; offers them in sighs and groans deeper than words. <sup>Rom 8.26</sup>

Our part in this prayer – both as individuals and as a congregation – is to learn to hear what's being prayed for, and willingly let ourselves be healed, renewed, and made whole; to willingly become Spirit centered like Jesus. The vision of the Spirit-filled Jesus before us is our role model. He beckons us to follow him; to become more like him; to embody more truly God's wisdom and love; you and me, and all of us together.

Let's pray. Lord Jesus, for the sake of the world you love, help us to be attentive to the Holy Spirit, and bear the fruits of the Spirit in our lives: love and joy, peace and patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Amen