



Icebreaker: *Imagine being given a surprise holiday to the Maldives for your birthday! What would your reaction be?
How on earth is this possible? So what do I need to do?*

*Last Sunday was Pentecost, known also as Whitsunday or the 'Birthday of the Church' when we celebrate the amazing story in **Acts Chapter 2: 1-4** of how the gift of the Holy Spirit came to the first disciples in wind and fire. This supernatural event had been promised to the disciples by Jesus at the last Supper. He explained to them that he was going to leave them soon, but that God will make His home with the disciples, and with anyone who loves Him. **Read John 14: 18-23***

"If anyone loves Me, he will obey My teaching. My Father will love him and We will come to him and make our home with him." John 14 verse 23

1. How on earth is this Possible?

- To faithful Jews the Spirit of God was the Father's life-giving breath (Hebrew *Ruach*). He was there at creation **Gen. 1:2** and sometimes gave a special person particular powers; but he was separate from them.
- God is perfect, pure and Holy: God's people are selfish and sinful: God's purity cannot tolerate sin, God & sin cannot mix: **Deut. 4:24**. The Israelites kept a safe distance between themselves and God and His Spirit.
- Jesus assures His disciples that God will send them **His Spirit** to come and **make His home in their souls**. What's more, this promise is for **anyone** who loves Jesus: a paradigm shift for Jews, dynamite for Gentiles.
- How does this happen?
On the cross, where Jesus died, dealing with the selfishness and sin that separates us from God.
God's wrath against sin is poured out onto His sinless Son and Christ is sacrificed for us & instead of us.
- A gateway to God is opened to everyone: He comes to live in our souls by His Spirit and the promise Jesus made in John 14 is fulfilled at Pentecost. Jesus has to die, so that we can be filled with God's presence.

2. So what do I need to do? Acts 2: 37

- **Read Revelation 3:20** The door in Holman Hunt's painting 'The Light of the World' is choked with weeds suggesting it hasn't been opened lately, and moreover it has no handle on the outside. Hunt explains: the handle is on the inside. Jesus never forces His way into our lives, He lets us choose to invite Him in.
- If that picture represents any of us, then we can open the door of our hearts at any time and in any place. But we may have reservations
- a) Is He going to be like a critical guest dispensing a permanent guilt complex? No! He assures us of the Father's love for us. He's by our side and on our side. He will prod us into repentance when we err, but the effect should be to transform us into people full of God's goodness, kindness and self-control.
- b) Is he going to be like a friend who visits you now and then but who only influences part of your life? No! A Christian is already owned by God; we need to release the grip we have on the things we thought were irrelevant, surrender them to God and ask the Holy Spirit to come in and stay for ever.
- Wherever we are with the Holy Spirit, there is always more He can do with us: "He is only a prayer away."

Questions for discussion

1. *Can you put into a few words what the Holy Spirit means to you?*
2. *Were you brought up with an understanding of the relationship between Calvary and Pentecost?*
3. *Are there areas of your life in which you don't reckon to get God involved?*
4. *Do you remember a particular time when the Holy Spirit entered your life? Was the experience underpinned by a helpful Bible verse, a healing, the receiving of a specific spiritual gift or something else?*
5. *In what way did the experience change your life?*
6. *Does the Holy Spirit work in the same way in everyone's life: can we all expect the same experience?*

Do not say that it is impossible to receive the Spirit of God. Do not say that it is possible to be made whole without Him. Do not say that one can possess Him without knowing it. Do not say that God does not manifest Himself to man. Do not say that men cannot perceive the divine light, or that it is impossible in this age! Never is it found to be impossible, my friends. On the contrary, it is entirely possible when one desires it.

St. Symeon the New Theologian 949 – 1022 AD