

6pm HC Pentecost Sunday 8th June 2025

Ex 33:7-20 & John 16:4b-15 – the Spirit convicts the world’s non-believers of sin, false righteousness and false judgment

The coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost wrought a transformation in the effectiveness of the first believers, with around 3,000 added to their number on that day. Our gospel reading sheds light on why Peter and the other disciples were suddenly able to convince people to put their trust in Jesus. As Jesus predicts, on that fateful night of his arrest, ***when the Holy Spirit comes, he will prove the world wrong about sin and righteousness and judgment.***

It is the Holy Spirit, who has been at work in people’s hearts and minds, ever since that first Pentecost. Since that day, the Holy Spirit has been convincing people who appear to have no time for the claims of Jesus of their sin, and of the world’s false ideas about righteousness, and judgment.

If people don’t believe in Jesus, they’re not going to accept his teaching, or believe his claims, or accept his assessment of them. They don’t turn to Jesus, because they don’t see that they need Jesus. It takes the work of the Holy Spirit to convince them.

And if we feel anxious about our ability to convert people, this fact should reassure us. We are not tasked with convincing people that they have got it all wrong about Jesus. Our only task is to be witnesses to what we know about God. We are asked just to share what we’ve learned about God from the Bible, and even more important than this, to share the difference that trusting in Jesus has made in our own lives.

Jesus tells the disciples that the Holy Spirit won’t just convict the world of its sin, he will also convict the world of its false sense of its own righteousness. Our sense of our own righteousness can often be based on some fairly shaky ground. All of us can probably think of people who would say that they try and lead a good life. They might be right in saying that they wouldn’t hurt anybody, wouldn’t speak ill of anybody; that they do a lot for good causes; and are generous to the people that they think are deserving of help. But the world’s morality isn’t the same as Christ’s morality.

In fact, being a good citizen and living an upright life can make us even *less* likely to realise that however hard we might try, we will never be righteous enough for God. Remember Nicodemus, an upstanding member of the religious council, and how hard he found it to accept Jesus telling him that he needed to be born again.

Convincing the world of its false righteousness was the work that Jesus had been doing, but as Jesus tells the disciples, it is now the work of the Holy Spirit ***because I am going to the Father and you will see me no longer***. Jesus is no longer around, to convince the likes of Nicodemus of their need for Jesus. Jesus isn't here to get into a conversation with your neighbour, or your nephew.

But now we have the Holy Spirit instead. The Father may have taken the top goal-scorer off the pitch, but the player who's been limbering up on the sidelines knows the game-plan, he has been expertly drilled in the strategy, and his special skill is in enabling even the most ordinary of players to play like champions.

Just as the Holy Spirit did with Peter, at Pentecost, bringing to Peter's mind the prophesy of Joel, the Holy Spirit can give us insight into how to make the Bible accessible to people. The Holy Spirit can give us the words we need to speak authentically and appealingly about our own experience of God. In fact, the more honest we are about the challenges of living as a Christian, even about our doubts and the discouragements, the more likely it is that people will see our faith as something real and believable and that they will want to know more.

And the Holy Spirit will convict the world of the wrong judgments that it makes; including the decision to put on a cross the only person ever to have been born who was without sin. Jesus was put on the cross by the fearfulness of the religious authorities and of Pontius Pilate, as well as by the fickleness of the crowd. But it was Satan, ***the ruler of this world who has been condemned***, who has been brought to defeat and destruction by Jesus' triumphant death and resurrection.

If those first believers were able to put their trust in the work of the Holy Spirit, we can do so too.