

## **ACTS 8:14-17 FILLED WITH THE SPIRIT**

Can you remember the first car you owned? or the second or third? I can remember all three: A Prince Skyline was the first, - a forerunner of the Datsun, I believe. I only had it for a year before it died. The second was a Morris 1100 - SO much room in that car! And the third was a little Mazda 1200 wagon. I was very fond of all of them.

When I was studying in Sydney, all of a sudden, my normally zippy Mazda 1200 became rather gutless. I griped about it over our terrace fence to our elderly neighbour Stan, who knew lots about cars and he offered to take a look. In the end, it was really a simple fix. One of the spark pugs wasn't firing, so the engine was only running on 3 out of it's four cylinders. He replaced the spark plug and it got back all its zip.

If we liken ourselves to that car and it's grunt or zip to the power of the Holy Spirit - you may see where we're going this morning.

In Acts 8, we have the story of the Christians in Samaria being prayed for by Peter and John to receive the infilling of the Holy Spirit. It seems that when Phillip had shared the Gospel with them they weren't told about the Holy Spirit.

Many reasons have been suggested for this oversight, but that's not what I want to look at this morning. I'd actually like to explore the what, rather than the why.

So what did happen? We know the story of Saul - how he persecuted the early believers prior to his conversion. His persecution became so intense, that the believers scattered for their own safety. This had a positive side though, as they proclaimed the message of Jesus wherever they went.

Phillip found himself in Samaria and God gave him a powerful ministry there. As Phillip preached the Gospel, God used him to heal and deliver people in Jesus name. Many believed and were baptised.

Peter and John (who were the head honchos of the early church at this point) received the news that there had been a great response to Philip's ministry in Samaria, and they decided to go there and encourage the new believers, as Phillip had moved on.

However, when they arrived, it seems they noticed that there was something missing. I imagine they quizzed the new converts, and found that they knew nothing about the Holy Spirit. Peter & John knew that these believers could not live the new life in Christ without the power of the Spirit so they they laid hands on them to receive the Holy Spirit.

This is one of those passages that is often used to teach that there needs to be a second or subsequent encounter with the Holy Spirit following conversion, for a Christian to be 'complete'.

Building a theology on a single passage is not good practice and when we look at the work of the Holy Spirit, I don't believe we can pin him down to a theology such as this.

The Holy Spirit is active in a believer's life from the word go

1 Corinthians 12:13 says, "For we were all baptised by one Spirit into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink."

Romans 8:9 tells us that if a person does not possess the Holy Spirit, he or she does not belong to Christ: "You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ."

Ephesians 1:13-14 teaches us that the Holy Spirit is the seal of salvation for all those who believe: "Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession—to the praise of his glory."

So the Holy Spirit is resident in every believer.

Certainly there are many people who have had an infilling of the Holy Spirit subsequent to their conversion; in fact it is something that we are all encouraged to seek. Paul exhorts the Ephesian Christians to "go on being filled with the Holy Spirit". So there isn't only a second filling with the Holy Spirit - there needs to be a third and a fourth - in fact, many, many ongoing fillings.

So - how do we know if we're filled with the Holy Spirit? What does it look like; what does it feel like?

From our Gospel reading this morning, John says, "I baptise you with water. But one who is more powerful than I will come, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptise you with the Holy Spirit and fire."

With the Holy Spirit and and FIRE! That's descriptive, isn't it?

The new converts in Samaria must have had a pretty fiery encounter that day. We don't know for sure, but it seems reasonable to assume that 'receiving the Holy Spirit' was a powerful experience for them, with some quite obvious manifestations of the Holy Spirit. We can assume this, because Simon the sorcerer 'saw' it happen. There was something to observe. He was so impressed by what he saw the apostles do, that he offered them money if they would give him the same ability to lay his hands on people to receive the Holy Spirit.

Sometimes we'll describe someone as being 'on fire' for the Lord. That usually means the person in question is an enthusiastic, energetic and powerful witness for the Lord. Perhaps they have a dynamic preaching or healing ministry, or they're always talking about their faith, leaving a string of converts in their wake....

Is that what it looks like to be filled with the Holy Spirit?

I'd answer that by saying that being 'on fire' in this way is one facet of being filled with the Spirit - but only one. If that's what we aspire to if we are looking to be filled with the Spirit ourselves, we are short changing ourselves.

John said Jesus would fill us with the Holy Spirit and with fire, so let's think about fire for a moment. Fire is definitely HOT - and fierce, and powerful! But there are also other aspects of fire, aren't there? Fire REFINES - it gets rid of the dross and the rubbish. Fire WARMS - it provides comfort and security. Fire also FUELS - it powers things.

So if we look at the metaphor of FIRE in the broader sense, we have a much better idea of what it means to be filled with the Holy Spirit.

- Being filled with the Holy Spirit does indeed **fire us up** and make us enthusiastic for Jesus. If we have a passion to share the love of Jesus with others, its evidence that we are filled with the Spirit.
- Being filled with the Holy Spirit also means that we are being **refined** by him. He slowly rounds off our corners; he challenges us to love and to forgive, and to be generous and kind. It means we are moving, degree by degree, towards being more Christlike. If we are maturing in Christ, it's evidence that we are filled with the Spirit.

- Being filled with the Holy Spirit means we are **warmed** by him. We have the comfort and security of knowing we belong to him. We know we belong to his family; we are assured that we will be with Jesus and our fellow believers in eternity. If we are secure in our relationship with Jesus and his Church, that is evidence we are filled with the Spirit.
- and being filled with the Holy Spirit means we are **fueled** or **empowered** by him. It's the power of the Holy Spirit within us that enables us live the life we're called to live. Through the presence of the Spirit within, we have the power to say no to sin. We are given the knowledge of what to say if put on the spot to defend our faith. We have the ability to hear and recognise his voice. In certain circumstances, we may be used as Phillip was used, to share the message of Jesus, accompanied by signs and wonders. If we are being empowered and equipped to live the Christian life - that is evidence we are filled with the Spirit.

So there is more to being filled with the Holy Spirit than just being a full on enthusiastic believer.

Having said that though, all of us may at some point experience some spiritual grit in our spark plugs. The worries and cares of everyday life can begin to get in the way of the spark, and we can find ourselves dropping back to three cylinders, or two, or maybe even limping along on one cylinder.....

The encouragement we have from our passage this morning is that this situation isn't terminal. If we are in a place where we feel we have cooled off a little in our faith - then we can respond to Paul's exhortation to 'be filled with the Spirit!' - or more accurately, to "go on being filled with the Spirit."

How do we do this? There are two important elements - just as there are when we first come to Christ.

- The first is to **repent**. If our spiritual ardour is fading, perhaps there is something in our lives we need to put right. If we ask God to show us if there's anything amiss - and we're prepared to listen - he'll tell us.
- The second is to **ask in faith**. We read in Luke 11:13, "If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!" It can be very helpful to ask others to pray for you - and to lay hands on you as well. If you are so moved - ask someone to pray with you after the service, or indicate when I serve you Communion if you'd like me to pray for you at the Communion rail.

Being filled with the Holy Spirit is our birthright as Christians. It is how we are transformed into the likeness of Jesus; and it is how the church can help transform the world.

Let's not settle for an underpowered faith this morning. We all need to be filled with the Spirit!

Let's pray.