

SERMON

The Wind and Fire of the Holy Spirit
Nunawading and Waverley, 23-5-21

Dear friends in Christ,

Today, we give thank for another gift from the **Wind and the Fire, the Holy Spirit**. John Zhong is going to be commissioned today to work as an evangelist, which means, gospel proclaimer. All here are evangelists because all Christians have the gospel. At 9:00am, the same time the Waverley service started today, the 120 disciples gathered in worship, poured out into the streets and all of them, not just an appointed few, but all of them were **declaring the wonders of God in various tongues**. However, the Holy Spirit has given John gifts to work in a special way as an evangelist, just as he has apportioned gifts to us all, so that we all join together to serve in a word and sacrament ministry. Our prayer is that the Holy Spirit will especially equip John with the gifts required to win many for Christ.

The wind of Pentecost was sudden and unforeseen but it was not a destructive wind. Words require wind, air moving across vocal cords. Where the Spirit is, there you will have inspiration, revelation, the sound of speaking, and tongues; all of them word-events. Wind leads to speaking.

We have **fire** before us, portrayed in this fire pit and the colour of red. Why is the Holy Spirit associated with fire? It goes back to a promise from John the Baptist's lips: **the Christ will baptise with the Holy Spirit and fire**. God's presence was described as a **consuming fire**: the fire on Mt Sinai, the burning bush, the pillar of fire at night and the fire that lit the altar when the first temple was built. The signs of the Holy Spirit are both wind and fire, tongues of fire and tongues of speech and language. So, fire leads to tongues, to proclaiming the salvation of God that has come through Jesus Christ.

Jesus said that the Holy Spirit was his greatest gift, alongside of his work of redeeming us. Like anything to do with salvation, the Holy Spirit is pure gift, unlearned by us and completely undeserved. I once left a present in the wardrobe and forgot to give it to a person in my family. Months passed before I discovered the hidden gift. Christ is

the present. He took the world's lost condition, the loneliness of people, its extreme anger and violence, its love of the wrong things like money, its arrogance and unwillingness to acknowledge him and he rid the world of them all through his crucifixion. But what if he rose from the dead and ascended to his place of glory and power and nothing more happened? It would have been to no avail, like a present in the corner of a dark wardrobe!

Salvation has to be placed into our hands like a present; better still, into our bodies and into our hearts and minds so that it grabs us and we truly experience the Lord. This is why Christ said: **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!** The Holy Spirit takes the gift of God's grace and favour from out of the wardrobe and places it into our hands. Paul, referring to the water of Baptism, said that the Holy Spirit is **poured into our hearts**. What the Holy Spirit dwells in he must save. Thus, the Holy Spirit in you is the guarantee you have the gift of Christ.

So, the wind and the fire are inside us. The first response will be proclaiming, speaking in tongues, that is, reaching people in their language. Some, men and women, even became prophets in the early church according to Joel. In chapter 4 of Acts, we hear that **the room was shaken and the Holy Spirit enabled the church to be bold**, to speak without fear. Wind and fire leads to speaking the word to others.

We speak in a way that can be understood by others. Dear John will speak Mandarin. You speak to your children in concrete ways that can be understood by them. The advanced student of the Bible is addressed in more technical ways. Our task as the church is to rejoice in being a holy temple in which the Spirit has entered as fire, wind, and the glory of God. As wind and fire in you, he moves us to speak; not just the evangelist or the pastor but all of us. We have tongues in our head, a spiritual tongue of the Holy Spirit interpreting the word of God for people to understand and a fiery tongue of boldness, which does not hold back. Let us pray that we do not stifle the Holy Spirit in us.