

Baptism and the Holy Spirit

A sermon given on Pentecost Sunday, 19th May 2024, by the Vicar, the Revd Canon Jonathan Baker, in Beverley Minster - the baptism of choristers Sophia and Skye

Acts 2:1-21

Come, , and fill our hearts, and kindle in us the fire of your love. Amen.

I'm staying down here because I want to be in the choir stalls where I can see our baptismal candidates. I'm just going to relocate myself so I can speak to those being baptised [Choristers Sophia and Skye].

Baptism is nothing if it's not about water. I want us to think for a moment about the ways in which we use water: we use it for drinking because if we don't drink, we shrivel up and die - all life needs water; we need to take water into our bodies to keep us alive; but we also need water to wash in and carry away the impurities and the bugs that might contaminate us. So water has that use where we take it in to keep us alive, but we need it to take away the dirt and the impurity. Water can be fun: we swim in water; we have water fights in hot weather (I once famously broke a rib tripping over during a water fight, getting carried away). So water can be fun, but water can also be dangerous if you're in too much of it and you can't swim. We need water to keep us warm. We have hot water bottles. We have central heating systems that circulate warm water around the house in the radiators to keep us warm at home. But we also use water to stay cool, a refreshing glass of water in the summer or putting ice cubes in our drinks. Water can warm us up or it can cool us down. And water can be something that transforms us. It changes things. Pasta isn't very nice without water. A cup of tea isn't a cup of tea without water. Without water, nothing grows. A seed just remains rather hard and dry and unexciting until the water helps it to germinate.

So water does all of these things: it keeps us alive; it washes us; it's something we can enjoy and have fun with; but it can also be dangerous; it's something that can warm us up or keep us cold; it's something that transforms us and helps us to grow.

In all of these ways, water is a very good picture of the Holy Spirit. That's why we use water at baptism. Because in baptism we believe the Spirit of God is doing all of these things. He's coming to bring new life - the life of God's love and God's presence dwelling within us to draw us closer to God and fill our lives with his loving presence. So the Spirit brings life and we celebrate that at Pentecost, the great feast day of the church where we celebrate the coming of the Holy Spirit upon the church. But baptism is also a sign of washing, of being made clean of our sins, of being forgiven. The Holy Spirit comes to cleanse us of our sins. It helps us to know God's forgiveness and mercy, and that whatever we've done wrong, the way back to God is always open because the Holy Spirit draws us. If we ignore God and we leave no space for him in our lives, then we get spiritually thirsty - we yearn for God, we long for him. The Holy Spirit is the one who awakens in us that thirst and who also quenches it as we turn to Christ and open our hearts to him so his Spirit can satisfy that deep longing in our hearts to know something satisfying and real.

The Holy Spirit can warm us up. He can excite us and give us joy. He can make us on fire for God, wanting us to serve Jesus and follow him. Maybe the Holy Spirit can also cool us down,

though, as he sharpens our conscience, makes us aware of things in our lives that aren't right and the things that we need to change, the things that we need to cool down and redirect and step back from. The Spirit is the one who changes us, who helps us to become more truly the people God has made us to be. He helps us to become more truly God's children - God's sons and daughters - and he helps us to grow in faith and to become more like Jesus.

It's a strange thing that as the Holy Spirit fills a person's life and guides and directs them, they both become more and more like Jesus, but also more and more uniquely themselves, - they become truly the person God has made them to be. The Spirit works that transformation amongst us and that's a kind of growth too, as we grow more into the likeness of Jesus and more into our own true selves - we grow as we follow Jesus more closely and it's the Holy Spirit who helps us to do that.

So Sophia and Skye, this is what you're in for - this is what baptism means. This is the promise of baptism that in the water of baptism, God the Holy Spirit comes to us to fill us with his love, to forgive us our sins, and to lead us on that journey of change and growth and transformation so that we can become more like Jesus and more uniquely like Sophia and Skye, as God has made you to be.

That's true for all of us on this Pentecost Sunday, as we pray for these youngsters and as we encourage them on this step of faith so all of us can pray afresh for the renewing power of the Holy Spirit to fill our lives, to revive us and refresh us, to transform us more and more into the likeness of Christ.

Reading Texts for Pentecost Sunday

Acts 2:1-21

¹ When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. ² And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. ³ Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. ⁴ All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability. ⁵ Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. ⁶ And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each. ⁷ Amazed and astonished, they asked, 'Are not all these who are speaking Galileans?' ⁸ And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language? ⁹ Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, ¹⁰ Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, ¹¹ Cretans and Arabs—in our own languages we hear them speaking about God's deeds of power.' ¹² All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, 'What does this mean?' ¹³ But others sneered and said, 'They are filled with new wine.'

¹⁴ But Peter, standing with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed them: 'Men of Judea and all who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and listen to what I say. ¹⁵ Indeed, these are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only nine o'clock in the morning. ¹⁶ No, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel:

¹⁷ "In the last days it will be, God declares,
that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh,
and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,
and your young men shall see visions,
and your old men shall dream dreams.

¹⁸ Even upon my slaves, both men and women,
in those days I will pour out my Spirit;
and they shall prophesy.

¹⁹ And I will show portents in the heaven above
and signs on the earth below,
blood, and fire, and smoky mist.

²⁰ The sun shall be turned to darkness
and the moon to blood,
before the coming of the Lord's great and glorious day.

²¹ Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved."

John 20:19–23

¹⁹ When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, 'Peace be with you.' ²⁰ After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. ²¹ Jesus said to them again, 'Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.' ²² When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit. ²³ If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.'

