



**Sunday Worship for 26th July
Seventh Sunday after Trinity**

The Holy Spirit: Good News From Bad



Introduction

Though we cannot come together physically, we gather spiritually as the family of God in our Father's presence to offer him praise and thanksgiving, to hear and receive his holy word, to bring before him the needs of the world, to ask forgiveness for our sins and to seek his grace, that, through his son Jesus Christ we may give ourselves for his service.

Service leader's intro from Brian Wake

Good morning to you all as we join in worship with love for God and love for each other. Some of us will be in St. Mary's for the first time for ages and be present with each other physically to see our service on screen and listen to the hymns and songs being played over the sound system. Others are worshipping in spirit from their homes. Our theme today is 'The Holy Spirit – good news from bad' and Paul will be helping us to understand how that can be.

Greeting

Lord, we ask you now, at the start of our service to
direct our thoughts, help us to pray
and inspire us to lift up our hearts to worship you
in spirit and in truth for Jesus sake.

Amen.

Song: Jesus, stand among us

**Jesus, stand among us
At the meeting of our lives
Be our sweet agreement
At the meeting of our eyes
O Jesus, we love You, so we gather here
Join our hearts in unity and take away our fear**

**So to You we're gathering
Out of each and every land
Christ the love between us
At the joining of our hands
O Jesus, we love You, so we gather here
Join our hearts in unity and take away our fear**

**Jesus, stand among us
At the breaking of the bread
Join us as one body
As we worship You, our Head
O Jesus, we love You, so we gather here
Join our hearts in unity and take away our fear**

Confession

God our Father, we come to you in sorrow for our sins.

**Forgive us our sins, O Lord:
The sins of our present and the sins of our past,
The sins of our souls and the sins of our bodies,
The sins which we have done to please ourselves and
the sins we have done to please others.
Forgive us our casual sins and our deliberate sins
And those which we have tried so to hide that we have hidden
them even from ourselves.
Forgive us O Lord; forgive us all our sins
For the sake of your Son, our Saviour, Jesus Christ.
Amen**

May Almighty God, who sent his son into the world to save sinners,
bring us his pardon and peace, now and for ever.

Amen.

Readings

Acts 28: 17-30

¹⁷ Three days later he called together the local Jewish leaders. When they had assembled, Paul said to them: "My brothers, although I have done nothing against our people or against the customs of our ancestors, I was arrested in Jerusalem and handed over to the Romans. ¹⁸ They examined me and wanted to release me, because I was not guilty of any crime deserving death. ¹⁹ The Jews objected, so I was compelled to make an appeal to Caesar. I certainly did not intend to bring any charge against my own people. ²⁰ For this reason I have asked to see you and talk with you. It is because of the hope of Israel that I am bound with this chain."

²¹ They replied, "We have not received any letters from Judea concerning you, and none of our people who have come from there has reported or said anything bad about you. ²² But we want to hear what your views are, for we know that people everywhere are talking against this sect."

²³ They arranged to meet Paul on a certain day, and came in even larger numbers to the place where he was staying. He witnessed to them from morning till evening, explaining about the kingdom of God, and from the Law of Moses and from the Prophets he tried to persuade them about Jesus. ²⁴ Some were convinced by what he said, but others would not believe. ²⁵ They disagreed among themselves and began to leave after Paul had made this final statement: "The Holy Spirit spoke the truth to your ancestors when he said through Isaiah the prophet:

²⁶ "'Go to this people and say,

"You will be ever hearing but never understanding;

you will be ever seeing but never perceiving."

²⁷ For this people's heart has become calloused;

they hardly hear with their ears,

and they have closed their eyes.

Otherwise they might see with their eyes,

hear with their ears,

understand with their hearts

and turn, and I would heal them.'

²⁸ "Therefore I want you to know that God's salvation has been sent to the Gentiles, and they will listen!" ^[29] And when he had said these words, the Jews departed and had a great dispute among themselves.

³⁰ For two whole years Paul stayed there in his own rented house and welcomed all who came to see him. ³¹ He proclaimed the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ—with all boldness and without hindrance!

This is the Word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

Isaiah 6: 8-13

⁸ Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?"
And I said, "Here am I. Send me!"

⁹ He said, "Go and tell this people:

"Be ever hearing, but never understanding;

be ever seeing, but never perceiving.'

¹⁰ Make the heart of this people calloused;

make their ears dull
and close their eyes.
Otherwise they might see with their eyes,
hear with their ears,
understand with their hearts,
and turn and be healed.”
¹¹ Then I said, “For how long, Lord?”
And he answered:
“Until the cities lie ruined
and without inhabitant,
until the houses are left deserted
and the fields ruined and ravaged,
¹² until the Lord has sent everyone far away
and the land is utterly forsaken.
¹³ And though a tenth remains in the land,
it will again be laid waste.
But as the terebinth and oak
leave stumps when they are cut down,
so the holy seed will be the stump in the land.”

This is the Word of the Lord.
Thanks be to God.

[Talk \(by Paul Clayton\)](#)

The Holy Spirit: Good News from Bad

Acts 28: 17 - 30 / Isaiah 6: 8 - 13

Today we conclude our sermon series on the work of the Holy Spirit according to the Book of Acts, with the sermon title: The Holy Spirit: Good News from Bad. The Bad News is that the people who God made the Old Covenant with, the nation of Israel, rejected his plan of Salvation when he sent his son Jesus:

“He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him”

John 1: 11

However, the Good News is:

“Yet to those who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.” John 1: 12

The wonderful Psalm 67: 2. says,

“That your ways may be made known on earth, your salvation among all nations.”

The emphasis here is on All Nations, the rest of the world. Salvation was not just for the Jews it was for the whole of the Gentile world, in other words it was for everyone.

So we have addressed all the issues in the sermon title and the sermon can end here! Not so, as we need to look at our two passages and see how the situation developed. Before we look at the passage from Acts, it's important to look at the Isaiah passage first.

Isaiah, the name means, "Salvation of the Lord", was the greatest of all of the writing prophets. He prophesied from 740 to 680 BC, during the reign of four kings as stated in Isaiah 1: 1.

"The vision concerning Judah and Jerusalem that Isaiah the son of Amoz saw during the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah, kings of Judah"

Isaiah is know mainly as a prophet in Judah and Jerusalem, but he is also know as the most important Messianic prophet, the one who told of the coming of the Messiah, Christ's birth (7: 14; 9: 6), Christ's Deity (9: 6-7), Christ's ministry (42: 1-7; 61: 1-2) Christ's suffering and death (52: 1 - 53: 12).

When God spoke to the prophets it was usually in a vision, as here with Isaiah. However, when the prophets spoke to the people it was in the power of the Holy Spirit.

In chapter 6: 8 we are told of the calling of Isaiah, one of the most well know callings in the entire Scriptures:

"Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?"

And I said, "Here am I. Send me!" Isaiah 6: 8.

Isaiah was unequivocal in his response. Perhaps a lesson in willingness for us all here in the twenty first century.

Following Isaiah's declaration of willingness we read of his prophetic commission in Isaiah 6: 9,10, and similarly repeated by Paul in Acts 28:26,27

"Go to this people and say, you will be ever hearing but never understanding; you will be ever seeing, but never perceiving.

For this people's heart has become calloused; they hardly hear with their ears, and they have closed their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts and turn, and I would heal them."

Harsh words from God through the prophet Isaiah about the Jews inability to recognise that God's salvation has been sent to the Gentiles.

In our reading from Acts we set the scene and learn what a difficult job Paul has in imparting the message of Salvation to Gentiles and Jews. Paul is in Rome as a prisoner from Jerusalem because of the problems he is causing preaching the gospel. (Paul as a Roman citizen has appealed to Caesar to state his cause. Paul is not seen as a dangerous criminal and is allowed to live in a rented house with only one guard.) On his arrival in Rome, he visits fellow Christians and shares fellowship

with them. Now in our reading, he has asked the Jewish leaders (not Christians) to meet him to explain his cause and talk about the Good News of Jesus. All seemed to be going well until Paul mentions the Isaiah prophecy.

He begins by saying, "The Holy Spirit spoke the truth to your forefather's when he said through Isaiah the prophet ..." Acts 28: 25b

I am sure you will have noticed the wording in the Acts passage is slightly different from the Isaiah passage. The answer is quite simple, Isaiah was written in Hebrew, but the Scriptures Paul used would have been written in Greek. In the third century BC, the Greek rulers who were occupying most of the Biblical world translated the Scriptures from Hebrew to Greek and called it the Septuagint.

Paul suggests that Isaiah's prophecy, which appears more of a riddle than a straightforward prophecy, applied to the Jewish leaders of his day, and in a similar way it applies to us 2000 years later.

The gist of the prophecy is that the people of Israel had been told many times about a coming Messiah and how things had to change, yet their two major senses did not appear to be functioning. They had stopped listening a long time ago and they could not see the wood for the trees. And in many ways that applies to the world today. The gospel message went out on the Day of Pentecost in the power of the Holy Spirit and has been going out for centuries but the world has failed to see or hear. Our two major senses are sight and hearing, which are mentioned in our prophecy. Seeing by a great margin is our dominant sense, which is interesting because that is what our virtual services are about, seeing, reading. However, when our preachers get back in the pulpit hearing is dominant.

Our prophecy talks about seeing and perceiving and perceiving literally means to interpret something or someone in a particular way. People do see things differently, like watching a football match and seeing the report afterwards. Was that the same match I was watching? It does not appear to be. The nation of Israel began to interpret the Scriptures and their religion in a particular way to make life more comfortable. In most cases to suit their own particular needs. Our Christian life can become like that if we are not careful.

CS Lewis once said;

"I did not turn to religion to make me happy, a bottle of port does that. If you want religion to make you feel comfortable, I don't recommend Christianity."

"Comfortable Christianity", a book by Caleb Seifu challenges our beliefs and perceptions of what real Christianity is. Comfort seeking is our default mode in this consumerist society. We do not want to be challenged at a service we only want to be made to feel good. When we are comfortable, we do not grow spiritually. To the nation of Israel, their religion had become too Law bound and lacked faith. An old English proverb says "Seeing is believing." However, Jesus said to Thomas after the resurrection:

"Because you have seen me you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed." John 20: 29

In my sermon from two weeks ago, I gave a quote from John Chrysostom:

"God made for us two kind of eyes: those of flesh and those of faith"

It's our eyes of faith that help us make real sense of what God has planned for us in our lives.

Furthermore, in Isaiah's prophecy he talks about hearing and understanding. Listening is a key factor in our everyday lives, the problem is at times we do more talking than listening. God gave us two ears but only one mouth, so we should listen twice as much as we talk. I remember a lady on television, who heard for the first time at the age of forty, her name was Joanne Milne from Gateshead, and she had been deaf from birth, but after an operation she could hear for the first time. Look it up on YouTube, it's very moving to see how she responded to receiving one of her major senses.

Most of us take hearing for granted, apart when we get older. As we listen we form a level of understanding in our thought process. The more we listen the more we understand. When I went on retreat before ordination I was to remain silent for the whole time. When you are in total silence it's amazing the things you hear. I was at a monastery in Northumberland and the silence was uncanny, God's creation took over. I was told on that retreat God will always speak in the stillness, quoting Elijah's experience.

"Go out and stand on the mountain before the Lord. And the Lord passed by and a great and strong wind tore into the mountains and broke the rocks in pieces before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake; and after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire; and after the fire, a still small voice" 1 Kings 19: 11/12

In our lives we all, at different times, encounter our metaphoric earthquake, wind and fire, but it's in the stillness we hear, "That still small voice of calm."

Many Christians miss out because of the turmoil in their lives, we can only hear God speak if we are prepared to listen.

"Be still and know that I am God" (Psalm 46: 10)

The prophecy tells us the more we hear, the better we understand and to understand with all of our hearts. To the Jewish people the heart was where decisions were made, to the Greek, the mind made decisions. I think in reality it's a mixture, but when we commit with our hearts it's a move of faith.

The calloused or hardened heart the prophecy was talking about was as a result of not being close to God. Again a warning for us to make sure our Christianity does not become bound in tasks.

James said:

"Come near to God and he will come near to you" (James 4: 8)

In our reading, after Paul had quoted the prophecy, he said to the Jewish Leaders;

"Therefore I want you to know that God's salvation has been sent to the Gentiles and they will listen" Acts 28: 28

Paul appears to put great emphasis on, "they will listen", saying to the Jewish leaders, you did not listen but they will.

The Biblical scholars amongst you will have noticed in the New International Version verse 29 is missing. In the Authorised Version, there is a verse 29 which says;

"After he had said this, the Jews left, arguing vigorously among themselves"

The earliest translations had verse 29 in, but with modern methods of textual criticism, most scholars suggest it was not part of the original text. Although it does appear to fit in with the overall argument of the Jewish leaders rejecting God's word.

Paul highlights how people like Isaiah, prophesying in the power of the Holy Spirit, were rejected in his day. Also, people like Elijah who moved in the power of the Spirit were also rejected. Indeed, all the prophets met the same fate, some giving their lives for the cause. This was because the people of Israel did not listen. Paul suggested to the leaders that nothing had changed, the people would not listen, but God has promised salvation to those who will listen, the Gentiles.

The same Holy Spirit who was with Isaiah and Paul is working with people today, transforming their lives. Let us pray this morning in the quiet of our own meditations, we hear that still small voice which gives us the reassurance of God's plan for our lives.

Amen

Song: Open our eyes Lord

**Open our eyes, Lord,
we want to see Jesus,
to reach out and touch him,
and say that we love him.**

**Open our ears, Lord,
and help us to listen.**

**Open our eyes, Lord,
we want to see Jesus.**

**Open our eyes, Lord,
we want to see Jesus,
to reach out and touch him,
and say that we love him.**

**Open our ears, Lord,
and help us to listen.**

**Open our eyes, Lord,
we want to see Jesus.**

Affirmation of Faith

Let us declare our faith in God.

**We believe in God the Father from whom
every family in heaven and earth is named.
We believe in God the Son who lives in our hearts
through faith and fills us with his love.
We believe in God the Holy Spirit who
strengthens us with power from on high.
We believe in one God; Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
Amen**

Prayers (written by Brian Settle)

Heavenly Father, we come before you to pray for the world, you created your world and we are meant to look after it. Jesus is our mediator and again you designed your kingdom so that we the people of God; your children could come to you in prayer to intercede for the fallen, crushed and helpless. We pray now as followers and believers of Jesus Christ; we are the body of Christ, his bride, so we can speak to those things as though they were not and those things that are not as though they were. You Lord, have given us all the authority of Christ to say to the 'mountains in our lives' "BE MOVED IN JESUS NAME"

THE LORD HEARS OUR PRAYER, **THANKS BE TO GOD**

We bring before you the many tribes and nations of people on our earth who do not have the same freedom that we have. The Uighur Muslims in China, many of whom are in detention centres and deprived of their way of life. We speak out and say 'release them from all bond ages in Jesus name' The Rohingya people in Myanmar, forced to flee their homes and live in a foreign land, 'restore them to their rightful place and bring healing and comfort to their families in Jesus name' The people in Belarus that find themselves treated as foreigners in their own land, deprived of the freedom to speak out. 'release this country from dictatorship In Jesus name' All over our world nations of people are denied basic human rights; in Hong Kong, North Korea, South Sudan, the Syrian refugees and the many still left behind in war zones, the tribal people in South America and other parts of our world. Human life is a wonderful gift from God and the good news is that many people in these countries and tribes are discovering Christ for themselves and finding hope and salvation.

THE LORD HEARS OUR PRAYER, **THANKS BE TO GOD**

Here in the UK, we hear of so many distressing experiences through our media; Lord reveal to us all the many stories of wonderful events Joan, the 104 yrs old lady now fund raising to celebrate her life-giving surgery when she was only 84. Captain Tom, now 100 yrs old and knighted by the Queen for his fund raising during the pandemic. We pause to reflect and consider the many babies born this week in safety, the many lives saved by our emergency services, the many demonstrations that occurred in our cities without the arrest or rough treatment shown elsewhere in our world. We pray for Great Britain to stand tall, resist evil and show kindness and tolerance to the citizens of England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. To show that same character towards any others that visit our Islands.

THE LORD HEARS OUR PRAYER, **THANKS BE TO GOD**

In our country today we have many who are waiting for appointments for cancer treatment, heart difficulties, diabetes and many more such illnesses and diseases. The Lord Jesus is our great

physician and we thank God for the many lives healed in the wonderful care of our NHS. We praise God that many miracles occur thanks to the prayers of his believing children. We remember too, the terminally ill, the very old and the dying. We pray that they will know the Lord and find peace and comfort. As people of God we pray that we won't be put off from still speaking into the lives of these loved ones, sharing the good news that the kingdom of God is near, that Jesus hears our prayers and tells his heavenly Father about them. His arms are not too short that they cannot save or heal anyone. So, Father in the mighty name of our Lord and saviour, Jesus Christ of Nazareth. We say "Be healed of all your sicknesses and diseases, the lame to walk, the blind to see, the deaf to hear and the dead to rise again in accordance with the scriptures" Lord God we pray for safe opening of everyday life in our communities, our churches, schools and workplaces. We thank you that in the midst of all this fear, confusion, isolation and bereavement, so much has changed for the better in people's lives. Families now enjoying each other's company, new ways of communicating with one another, old ways renewed as more letters get written to loved ones. We lift up all who are finding these times difficult; financially, emotionally and spiritually. We pray for all victims of domestic violence, that safety will be found for them, that men, women and children will hear the good news. We pray for all who are desperate that they will hear from our prayers and our mouths that they can be safe, saved, blessed, redeemed, forgiven and heirs to the family of God. We pray that all who listen will hear 'Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow'

THE LORD HEARS OUR PRAYER, **THANKS BE TO GOD**

WE ASK ALL THESE PRAYERS IN THE NAME OF JESUS CHRIST OF NAZERETH, AMEN.

Collect for the day

**Generous God,
you give us gifts and make them grow:
though our faith is small as mustard seed,
make it grow to your glory
and the flourishing of your kingdom;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.**

The Lord's Prayer

**Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name.
Your kingdom come,
your will be done
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those
who sin against us.
Lead us not into temptation
but deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power
and the glory are yours,
now and for ever. Amen**

The Peace

At this point, we would normally share God's peace with each other. We cannot do that physically but please spend a few minutes now praying for specific people at St. Mary's...

Song: O thou who camest from above

**O Thou who camest from above
the pure, celestial fire to impart,
kindle a flame of sacred love
on the mean altar of my heart.**

**There let it for Thy glory burn,
with inextinguishable blaze;
and, trembling, to its source return
in humble love and fervent praise.**

**Jesus, confirm my heart's desire
to work and speak and think for Thee;
still let me guard the holy fire,
and still stir up Thy gift in me**

**Ready for all Thy perfect will,
my acts of faith and love repeat,
till death Thine endless mercies seal,
and make the sacrifice complete**

The Blessing

**May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ
and the love of God
and the fellowship of the powerful Holy Spirit
be with us all, wherever we are,
today and for evermore.**

Amen.

Go in peace to love
and serve the Lord.
In the name of Christ,
Amen.