

Dear Friends

I've been thinking to myself if there was one thing I really wanted people to know, what would it be? The simple truth is, I can only answer that question in one way. That is to say, that I truly wish that everybody really understood and had experienced for themselves the infilling power of God's Holy Spirit in their life. It has of course been my calling to share this hope and expectation with the people of the Benefice of Hallow, Grimley and Holt over my time here and I have lost count of the number of times that I have shared my testimony. Those who have done Saints Alive have heard it in full detail but I have shared aspects of it both from the pulpit and in this magazine as well. Many other conversations have been illustrated by testimonies of the work of God's grace in my life.

My first experience, once I knew God was in my life, was an amazing intensity of peace. The Bible talks about the peace that passes all understanding and the biblical word is Shalom. Shalom is more than peace, it is a total integration into God's will and purpose. It comes with an assurance that whatever happens, God will keep you safe and secure. Nothing can harm you and you will be brought safely into God's Kingdom.

The next feeling I suppose is conviction. When you accept God is real, God shows you how real He is. All the things you were taught about the Christian Faith become intensely true for you. The Resurrection of Jesus is real because you meet with the risen Jesus and He brings you into the Father's arms. Life is suddenly fuller and richer, colours more vibrant and you know that this will never be taken from you. Death is not to be feared because it is a transition to a fuller, freer life in the constant presence of God.

Another quality is a sense of being clean. This is not easy to explain, but it rests on the work of Jesus on the Cross and how He paid the price of our wrong doing. We tell ourselves that He cleans us up, but until the Holy Spirit brings it into our lives and we accept it in our hearts, as well as our heads, we cannot feel the power of it. It is not that this means we ignore or forget the mistakes we've made, in fact very much the opposite, we become intensely aware of our frailty and even that we are prone to more errors. It is just that we know we are forgiven and blessed by our God.

Furthermore, we know that our relationship with God is something that we can grow in. We are constantly being drawn into the Father's love as we worship Him with all that we have within us. This can take us to new heights in the experience of God's love for us. We are also released to work for God, caring for others and sharing the truth of God's love with them. It is another special joy when they too can share their own experiences of God with us and so make our fellowship with them so immensely rewarding.

Things are not always plain sailing though. Life continues as it always has and we have to make the joys of our Spirit life, part and parcel of what comes up each day. As we do this, however, we have a real sense of security. We know that this world is not the last word on the life that God gives to us. Indeed He leads us in new ways that mean we have to let go of the things of this world so that we might engage properly with the world that we are moving into. In all of this, as we trust God, He will enable it to be a source of great joy because it is always leading into something better. One of my most treasured Spirit experiences was when in the midst of failure and brokenness, God reached out to help me understand the necessity of allowing Him to completely have my life so that I might know the fullness of His blessing and so He might bless others through me.

So why is all of this important? Well this month we move through the final part of the celebration of Easter and mark the Ascension of Jesus back to heaven to be with our Heavenly Father. We also celebrate the coming of the Holy Spirit into the lives of the early believers. On the Day of Pentecost not only was a new community, The Church, brought into being but also the promise of Jesus was

fulfilled in that the disciples were “clothed with power from on high.” (Luke 24 v 49) However, this gift is not just for the privileged few but as Luke tells us elsewhere it fulfilled the prophecy of Joel, “In the last days God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people.” (Acts 2 v 17) So that means you, it means all those you love, all can know of this wonderful blessing of God. All you need to do is humbly ask and trust in faith and God will fill you with His presence and immeasurable peace.

May the Lord richly bless you.