

SERMON – PENTECOST 2023 Lead us not into temptation.

What I want to focus on today is the central synergy between ‘what actually happens’ on Pentecost and crucial words of the Lord’s Prayer. And for me, it all comes down to the **promise and the prayer**.
The promise is from Jesus - these words.

“I have said these things to you while I am still with you. But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, will teach you everything and remind you of all that I have said to you.

This is Jesus speaking to his confused and beleaguered disciples just before His journey to the Cross and he promises them that the Father will send the Holy Spirit in His name to be their ‘helper’. The same promise is repeated by Jesus in Luke 24:49. **“And see, I am sending upon you what my Father promised, so stay here in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high.”**

Pentecost is the moment ... when this promise is made manifest.

The promise from Jesus that the Father will send the empowering, transforming presence of the Holy Spirit into the world and our lives. Why? To help us.

How? By teaching us, leading and guiding us. To remind us of EVERYTHING that Jesus Christ taught us. The Holy Spirit’s main endeavour is to be a witness to the Way and the truth of Christ in this world and in our lives.

And this Eternal promise from Jesus is as true today for you and I, as it was on the day of Pentecost. That in and through the power of the Holy Spirit we will always have the presence of Christ - the Spirit of the living God alongside us for our lives. We can **always** be clothed with the power from on high.

I guess the question Pentecost puts before all of us, ... **is how much do we believe and have faith in this promise? And how much do we centre our lives around the truth of this promise?**



These are important questions, because the Father and Son sent the Holy Spirit knowing that there are 3 inescapable truths of life and faith.

Firstly, we will always have temptations, trials and testing. It comes with the package of being human. Jesus Himself tells us this in John 16.33. **“In this life here on earth you will have many trials and sorrows.** I used to think that as I got older life would calm down and get a little easier. Sorry to tell anyone younger than me, but it doesn’t.

And there’s a second inescapable truth we need to acknowledge.

If we make a commitment to follow Christ, to let Christ lead us deeper into the ways of faith, hope and love, then we will face resistance. We **will** experience the voice of the One who tries to mess with our heads and hearts and lead us down paths that are contrary to the good purposes of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

You and I will encounter the ever-present gravitational pull of the darker forces that try to derail us from the train lines of these good purposes. And all of this will come in a myriad of expressions and guises. So obvious some subtle. And I have to say, that since I came to faith, I’ve personally experienced this truth many times.

Which means we have to acknowledge a third inescapable truth.

But it does give us the deepest and most liberating wisdom of them all.

The wisdom to realise that we can't do any of this under our own steam. It took me 40 years to realise the illusion of self-sufficiency. Or delusion.

The only way we can resist temptations in whatever form they come - the only way we can find the *wisdom* and the *wherewithal* to come through the multitude of trials that life and faith will throw at us, is in and through the power of the Holy Spirit.

This is the core synergy of Pentecost and this prayer.

Jesus knew that his early followers would face all of the above, and they did.

Read the book of Acts and see how many times they experienced temptations, trials and severe testing. Which is why Jesus sends them the promise of the Holy Spirit.

If we are committed in our everyday, so-called ordinary lives, to living out the true, the beautiful and the good then we will meet resistance. From the world, and trickier to discern, from our own hearts. It is *because* we are involved in divine work, with a divine purpose, that we need the divine power of the Holy Spirit to equip, empower and enable us for these sacred endeavours.

Any church community that doesn't open itself up to the work of the Spirit and make its central to its life, will never become the community God calls it to be.

So on this day of Pentecost lets ground all of this in the personal reality of our everyday lives.

What are the temptations, the trials and the testing's most at the fore for you?

- Maybe a temptation to give in to a spirit of despair and loss of hope.
- Tempted to believe the voice of the accuser who whispers daily that you are 'not enough.' So much so it can begin to shape your reality.
- Tempted to believe in the illusion of 'self-sufficiency'.
- The trial of watching a loved one suffer in some way.
- A past trauma wound that continues to bleed.
- Gripped by a spirit of anxiety and desperate for a breakthrough.
- Or just an all-pervading sense of disconnect, dislocation and alienation.

On a personal level, as always, there's nothing like preparing a sermon to make you reflect on your own wrestling's. At Mens breakfast yesterday, Tim Wilson spoke of his own experiences around the importance of failure. And how often our failures can bring us closer to God and lead us into a deeper fortitude.

It all spoke into my deeper illumination this past week. That the only reason I came to faith, is **because** I was led down spiritual rabbit holes, I did make mistakes and experienced failure. I reached a place of calling out to God for help. And my whole life was turned around.

But this is why I have an unshakable belief in the unconditional redeeming power of Grace and the work of the Holy Spirit.

My biggest temptation now, is at times to listen too much to the accusing voice that keeps alive my deepest hurts about my failures and regrets. But then in prayer, I hear the voice of the Holy Spirit, the helper, reminding me that I am the sum of all my experiences. That I wouldn't be who I am today if I hadn't had my temptations and failures. Isn't this the sacred truth of all our lives?

The beauty of the Living Christ at work in all our lives. Isn't this what saves us **IN** our time of trial. As we heard on the day of Pentecost from Peter, **"the Lord saves everyone who calls out for his help."**

So in a moment we'll have some time to bring our personal situations to our time of Holy Spirit ministry. This will be a time to enter fully into this promise from Jesus and ask for the Spirit's power to bring to you whatever is your need for this moment in time. To be your helper. To provide insight, illumination, and breakthrough. To sow seeds of healing

To take us to this time and bring this all together, I want to bring us back the promise of Jesus made manifest at Pentecost. The Eternal promise that the Holy Spirit is sent here to help us. To remind us of all Jesus taught us.

As we look at the life of Christ, what are the core truths HE taught us?

For this day and this prayer, I'll offer three.

Firstly, in this life, in this human experience, we will have times of tempting, trial and testing.

Especially if we commit to walking the Way of Christ. Look at the life of Jesus.

The desert wilderness experience. The anguish of Gethsemane. The constant hounding by the religious authorities. The scandal of the Cross, where our human capacity for evil is on full display as we scapegoat and put to death an innocent man.

But isn't this the beautiful paradox of our Christian faith? The reason it has such an authentic transformative core, is because Jesus walked and fully lived the human experience.

How many times must Jesus have been **tempted** to respond in ways that wouldn't have given the world a radically different way of being human. There is a good reason why scripture tells us that Jesus is the radiance of God's glory.

Which brings us to the second core truth I believe Jesus taught us.

The centrality of Prayer. The Lord's prayer is just that, the prayer of our Lord.

Prayer was a non-negotiable part of who Jesus is and he gave us the Lord's Prayer to be the framework for all our prayers. Because prayer is **where** the Spirit **leads us** into a deeper encounter with God.

Isn't one of our most self-defeating temptations, that we can neglect the power of prayer, at the very time we most need it for our souls. Our deepest times of trial and testing call for our deepest times of prayer. **And** our deepest times of surrender and trust.

Have you ever wondered what prompted the disciples ask Jesus... **Master teach us how to pray**? Is it because they clearly saw the link between the fruit of Jesus' life and actions and the fertile soil of His prayer life. Kingdom fruit cultivated from his times of deep Communion with God. And what does this say to you and I today?

Well it gives us the third core truth Jesus taught us.

Matthew 7:16 ... "By your fruits you will be known."

At the heart of Pentecost is the biggest fruit of them all. **Transformation.**

And it's the ongoing journey for all of us. Are we being transformed by the Spirit to cultivate the life-giving qualities of the Spirit? And yes, lets remind ourselves once again of what they are... **Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.** Galatians 5:22-23

The Holy Spirit give us the good *gifts*, but the gifts are always in service to the fruit. I long ago lost interest in heated discussions between Christians trying to assert their religious credentials with whatever badge of honour they choose to display. Jesus made it clear **It's by our fruit that we will be known.**

What does a Spirit-filled Church look like?

Well show me a community of people manifesting the fruit of the Spirit and all of it clothed in love. And I'll show you a people and a community clothed in the power from on high.

So let's have some time to truly open our hearts in faith to the promise of Jesus.

An opportunity to experience this redeeming power of the Holy Spirit.

Bring your situations of and trial, testing and temptation to this time. As you do imagine that these words from Jesus are being spoken directly to you today for your situations.

"I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear. 13 But when the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth. 14 The Spirit will glorify me because it is from me that the Spirit will receive what the Spirit will make known to you.