

Ben and I were talking the other day about what a great Christmas we've just had- you know sometimes you have really good Christmasses and other times you have an OK Christmas. Well last Christmas for us was a good one, particularly because we spent lots of time with friends and family. Christmas Day though was though a bit....glittery, thanks to three of my nieces wearing their matching dressing up, glitter infested Elsa dresses from the film Frozen...we spent much of the day sparkling in one way or another! Has anyone seen that film? The film Frozen? It's a great movie particularly because in it, there's this cute little character called Olaf. Olaf is a snowman and Olaf wonders what it would be like to be a snowman in the Summer - he clearly hasn't yet thought through all the consequences of what that might mean for him. But at the end of the movie little Olaf gets his own climate- so wherever Olaf goes it's always snowing. I think this is just a wonderful illustration of what it is like to have God's **presence** with you all the time. Just like Olaf has his own climate wherever he goes, you have the Presence and power of the Holy Spirit in your lives wherever you go. And because you carry the Presence of the Holy Spirit, you are permeating and touching the lives of others around you in everything you do- at home, at work and with your friends.

So how does this work? Well to understand this, we need to take a look at the bible. Let's turn to the book of Acts which is in the New Testament part of the Bible. The bit we're reading from is after the resurrection when Jesus appeared to many people including the disciples. You'll find it on page xxxx of the bibles in your pews or you can look at it on the screen. In this passage Jesus is telling the disciples that he's not going to be with them for much longer but he's leaving with them a counsellor, or helper- that's the Holy Spirit, to guide them and help them in their lives.

"After his suffering, Jesus presented himself to them and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God. On one occasion, while he was eating with them, he gave them this command: "Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. For John baptised with water, but in a few days you will be baptised with the Holy Spirit. Then they gathered around him and asked him, "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?" He said to them: "It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. But

you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

So, shortly after Jesus had said this there was a festival called Pentecost, and the Holy Spirit came, just as Jesus had promised. And to give a bit of context, there were huge amounts of people there, gathered in Jerusalem from all corners of the earth to celebrate the wheat harvest. And God sent the Holy Spirit. And since then all believers have a strong sign of God's presence with them. **The moment you decide to follow Jesus, God cleanses you of all the stuff you have done wrong and simultaneously fills you with his Holy Spirit.** The Holy Spirit that lives in you starts broadcasting to your own spirit a non-stop signal proclaiming God's presence in your life. Over a period of time, you grow to realise that you are never alone. God's presence is real. You can feel it. God's Holy Spirit is with you wherever you go.

When we practice being aware of the presence of the Holy Spirit, we pick up signals throughout the day. At work, at school, in your car or wherever you are, you begin to communicate with the Lord. You share your heart with Him and you know He's listening. It has nothing to do with being in a church building, it has to do with God's presence in and around you. Colossians 1:27 says 'it's Christ in you, the hope of glory'.

So back to the text-after Jesus had told the disciples to wait for the presence of the Holy Spirit, what did he say next?

"You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth"

So Jesus had said to wait for the Holy Spirit and now he was giving the apostles an agenda: Jerusalem first, then Judea (which was the surrounding countryside) and then to Samaria (the hated semi-foreigners living nearby) and to the ends of the earth. What did Jerusalem represent to the first disciples of Jesus? I think to them it felt like a very difficult place to tell people about the risen Jesus. It was where Peter denied that he knew Jesus three times. So I think Jesus says he wants us to start in the **place** of our greatest failure. Where is that for most of us? Family? Friends?neighbours? Colleagues? If God's plan is to use us, the local church, to extend His Kingdom in the world,

we have to start by going to reach **our** world- to our friends, neighbours, colleagues.

Some people believe that in order to see God at work you have to go on a mission trip somewhere. I'm all for mission trips, I've done some myself and I love them but I'd encourage you to go on a mission trip next door. You don't need to go to somewhere exotic. Go on a mission trip next door to your neighbours and see God's Kingdom come in their lives, see how God can come and bless them and love them.

So we've seen that Jesus told the disciples to wait for the Presence of Power of the Holy Spirit, he then told them to go out to Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and to the ends of the earth. How did they then respond to these instructions? Well they started by simply praying. Acts 1:14 says, 'They all joined together constantly in prayer'.

Where do you love to pray? When do you pray? **When** do you pray for your friends and neighbours? It's worth trying to find a time or place that really works for you because when you start to pray regularly for your friends, you **will** see what God is doing in their lives. Over the last year I have been doing something called the 'examen'...it's simply writing down some of the things that I've done in my day and looking at the list to see what has been life-giving and what has been life draining. It helps me to pay attention to God's activity in my life- its good to do with kids too for those of you that are parents- it's like a de-briefing with God at the end of the day. As I have looked back, one of the things I noticed was that I love to go for a walk and pray. And as I walk, I'm praying in the Kingdom, I'm praying for Headingley, praying for my boys, I'm praying for people who don't know Jesus, I pray out loud so there is a tendency I might look a bit daft but then I think people must just think I must just be wearing one of those inner ear phone things! So I'd encourage you to find a time that is good for you to pray. It's important. Maybe when you're driving or waiting for the kettle to boil - make a list of the people you know who don't know Jesus and make a commitment to pray for them. Start with one.

I do Zumba every Friday morning- I love it, it's definitely up there as a highlight of my week. The people there have become dear friends over the last year from starting to have coffee afterwards. I pray for them regularly - I pray for them because I care for them. And God is at work in their lives. There's this phrase which I reckon is true- 'people don't care how much you know until

they know how much you care.' When we read about the early disciples and what happened at Pentecost, we need to take note of how they spent a lot of their time praying and caring. Acts 2 says they prayed and prayed and 'repeatedly gave to everyone in need'. Often we think we need to have clever words or know the bible inside out to join in with what God's doing. I would suggest often you need to just pray and care. So sometimes we need to talk (some of us more than others) but sometimes we just need to care. Saint Francis said " Proclaim the gospel at all times, and when necessary use words". By this he wasn't saying words were unnecessary - he was just saying our words have much more credibility if our lives back up our words.

When we pray - coincidences happen, when we don't, they don't. Pray in God's Kingdom, pray that God would speak to your friends in dreams. Did you know that the majority of Muslims who are coming to Jesus today are coming to Jesus through dreams....God is revealing himself in dreams to people. Let's pray that God reveals himself to our neighbours, colleagues and friends through dreams and visions. That the Lord would melt their heart and that we would have an opportunity to dialogue, to talk and pray with them.

Back to Zumba- one of my Zumba friends is called Kate - she texted me the other day to say that she had really hurt her ankle walking her dog so she couldn't come to Zumba but she was going to join us afterwards. So the class finished and out we came into the changing room. Kate's there and we all ask her how her ankle is. And then I got this quiver in my liver. It's like a nudge and I knew it was the Holy Spirit inside me prompting me to pray for Kate's ankle to be healed. So there were quite a few of us there so I prayed God would make me on my own with Kate. All the others went to get changed and there was me and Kate left. I said to her, "You know I really believe that God can heal that, can I pray for it right now?" She says 'yes sure'. So I bent down, and prayed. "God I thank you for your healing power. In the name of Jesus I command this ankle to be fully healed, for all the swelling to go down and it to be fully restored,' I asked her how it went and there wasn't that much difference. We all went upstairs and had a drink and a chin wag. You see I had done my bit, it was up to God to do the rest. Sometimes we don't see immediate healing but two hours later Kate, who's given me permission to read this, texted me to say this,

"I had to text to say thank you for praying for my foot earlier day- I can honestly say that it is hugely improved- not 100% better but around 80%!! I

am not saying this to be kind or flattering but I am genuinely amazed at the transformation- you're an angel!"

I believe I had an opportunity to pray that morning because I'd been praying for Kate and for an opportunity to chat to her about Jesus.

So the disciples had waited for the Holy Spirit, they had received their instructions to go to Jerusalem first, they started by praying a lot, they cared a lot and they were also always consistent. They acted the same way in their meetings as they did at the temple gate. A friend was telling me about a guy called Sean in their church who was seeing tonnes of stuff happening with his friends and people around him. People in the church started asking him what he was doing differently cause it was amazing what was going on. Sean was quite bewildered. **He said that he just behaved at work like he would in his housegroup.** He was surprised that other people behaved differently in one setting to another. He explained that if someone was ill in housegroup, he'd pray for healing, and invite Jesus into the situation, if someone in housegroup was going through some tricky stuff with how they brought up their kids, people would pray for them and ask Jesus into the situation- so why would he not do the same when he wasn't in housegroup when he was the same person? So when Sean's at work and someone is ill, he offers to pray for them and invites Jesus into their situation. He's consistent in being himself, he's the same person whatever he is doing. He's consistent about inviting Jesus into everyday situations.

I believe God wants us **out there** carrying the power and presence of the Holy Spirit with us. I think it's his plan and his intention for us to be **out there**. Let me explain- if we look at what happened at Pentecost people came from all the corners of the earth to Jerusalem and God sent the Holy Spirit to them. By doing this he turned everything on it's head. Because no longer did everyone from every corner of the earth need to come back to some centre, to Jerusalem to hear the word of God but rather the word of God would go out to every corner of the earth? I really believe that if you've never seen anyone healed, it's probably because you're not praying for people **out there** who don't know Jesus yet. God **wants us** praying for people who don't know Him. I don't know how it works but in my experience I see God healing so much more with people who don't know Him yet. Like I said to my friend Kate, I believe he healed her ankle because he wants to get her attention. He loves her, adores her and just wants to communicate that to her. So, if you want to see people

healed, be consistent, be the same wherever you are, invite Jesus into situations with your friends and pray for them, I guarantee you'll see people healed.

The disciples were ordinary, sinful, yet transformed people, but as Acts 17 says, they 'turned the world upside down' because they knew they carried the presence and power of the Holy Spirit in their lives. And people started to notice there was something different about them. After Pentecost, the unbelieving leaders of the day said in Acts 4, 'When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realised that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus.'

I've told a story before of when a few of us were in a coffee shop several years ago. Before going there we asked the Holy Spirit to show us what He was doing in the lives of the people sitting there that morning. If He wanted us to join in, we were available, if not, we would just have a coffee and chat. And from my point of view what happened was that I simply looked across at this lady who I had never met before and felt the Holy Spirit tell me that He wanted her to be a peacemaker. So I needed to go and tell her but as you can imagine I was slightly on the nervous side! Joyce Meyer wonderfully says that in these situations 'you're palms will sweat and your mouth will be dry but just lick your palm and get on with it!' My palms were absolutely sweaty and my mouth was dry but I did somehow get myself over to her table and shared what I thought God wanted to say to her. The lady is called Miriam and she is going to tell you from her point of view what God did that day. This is simply to encourage all of you to practice listening to the nudges of the Holy Spirit living in you because it's worth it.

Play the clip.

Miriam is a dear friend of mine now, a follower of Jesus and also part of our Zumba posse. I would never have had the privilege of her friendship and being involved in her life if that hadn't happened.

Robbie Dawkins says, '*You might think that you don't have enough faith to see things happen. But the truth is that if you're able to step out in obedience to see something done, you have enough faith to accomplish it.*

Let's sum up- The disciples lived at a time when it was dangerous to talk about the risen Jesus but we live in a country where we are free to talk to people about Him. So I'd encourage you to take a ministry trip next door, to be consistent and to pray and care for those around you. If there is one thing to remember this morning, remember that you are like Olaf, you are a carrier of God's Kingdom so expect things to happen around you. I read Robbie Dawkins' book about a year ago and since then every morning, when I'm driving up my road, I pray this prayer that he suggested cause it sums up what I want to see in my day. You can do the same cause it's very short and so I'll end with this:

"Lord help me to pay attention to what you're doing around me today and give me courage to join in with what you're doing"