

Reflection on Sunday 6 March 2022

by Forbes Mutch, Lay Leader of Worship

Gospel: Luke 4: 1-13

Being filled with the Holy Spirit

So, Jesus was *full of the Holy Spirit*. What a wonderful thought. I wonder what it felt like.

I was sitting by the fire in the sitting room this week - and what better week to sit by the fire? I was trying to get to grips with Luke Chapter 4, today's gospel. It's a familiar passage, telling the tale of Christ's tussle with the Devil in the desert. But, rather than focussing on Christ's resistance to temptation, I kept coming back to the idea of being filled with the Holy Spirit.

What does it mean to be filled with the Holy Spirit?

Surely people who are full of the Holy Spirit are lively, gregarious, joyful about everything, clapping and singing? Or do they speak in tongues? Do they radiate a sense of peace? Or do they just get on quietly with their lives, doing God's will on Earth?

The answer to these rhetorical questions, I suspect, is 'yes', all of these ways and more... in which case, I found myself trying to recall times when I had felt filled with the Holy Spirit. And, if I had been filled with the Holy Spirit, what had I done with the experience? What difference had it made to my life?

As some of you know, my father died recently. Don't worry, I'm ok about it. He was nearly 95 and had led a fruitful life. He had a stroke and was in hospital for 3-4 weeks before being transferred back to the care home where he lived with my mother, so that they could be together for what we knew would be his last few days. They had been together for over 70 years, after all.

I knew that once he was back in the care home, I wouldn't be able to see him because of COVID restrictions. So, I took the opportunity to say goodbye to him while he was still in hospital.

He was resting peacefully in his hospital bed; he was paralysed down one side, he couldn't talk and he had his eyes closed. I bent close to him and whispered: *"You know, you were the best Dad ever. I loved your values, I loved your kindness, I loved the magic tricks you used to perform when we were kids, and I loved your whisky. But, most of all, I loved your sense of humour."* And I kissed him.

It was a lovely moment, and I did feel the Spirit of the Holy Spirit or the presence of God close by at that time.

When I came out of the hospital a few minutes later, I thought WHY? Why do we always leave it until the last minute; why do we wait until someone is dying or has even passed away before we tell them how much we love them?

And the lesson I immediately learnt, instantly, right there, was that I (that all of us who are Christians) should capture in our hearts those moments when we feel filled by the Spirit of God and use that resource. We should harness that power and extend the

moment; we should look back and say, "*I should feel and be like this all the time*".

It's not easy, of course, and I'm being deliberately naïve. It's an aspiration more than an achievable reality day after day. But I, for one, will make more effort to try and recognise when God is close and make more of the moment, make more of the strength that He provides.

Jesus did that in the desert. And that's the other thing that I find fascinating about Luke Chapter 4.

Jesus has just been baptised in the River Jordan; the Holy Spirit descends in the form of a dove, Jesus climbs out of the water, glowing with the praise and authority of his father; he crosses over to the far bank and wanders off into the wilderness for 40 days.

I'm sure I don't need to tell you that our lives can be like that - a moment of special high achievement can be followed by a period in the wilderness.

But it's often in personal moments of darkness and wilderness that we feel closest to God and maybe even been filled with the Holy Spirit without realising it.

And the conclusion that I came to, as the log fire blazed away, contemplating what it must feel like to be filled with the Holy Spirit, is that we probably all are at different times but we just don't recognise those moments at the time, but only in hindsight. And it is different for different people in different circumstances.

For me at least, it's a feeling of strength and confidence, knowing that God is with me. For some it might mean that they sing and clap joyfully. For others, they may talk in tongues. Some may spread a sense of peace or they might just get on with their day-to-day lives with great resolve. The point is, we can all be filled with the Holy Spirit and just not recognise the moment.

I would like to leave you with a question: when have you been filled with the Holy Spirit and what impression or difference did it make?

For me, I know that I was given the confidence to say to my Dad what I should have been saying for 40 years. He smiled, particularly at the quip about his whisky, so I feel good about that moment and will continue to draw strength from our shared moment which was filled with the Holy Spirit.

Amen.

