

## Bennochy church: 8<sup>th</sup> June 2014

We sometimes read the Old Testament as if the Spirit of God did not exist. When we think of the spirit, we think of Pentecost and those dramatic days in Jerusalem. Yet interwoven into the many stories of the ancient people of God, the spirit is there, we just need eyes to see; it is there in the power of creation, in the words of the prophets, their brave cries seeking justice; it was given by God for mighty deeds, for craftsmanship of the highest skill, for wisdom and understanding and even new hearts. I will give you a new heart and a new mind; I will put my spirit in you. (Ezekiel 36: 25-27) It was the spirit of God that formed the mighty army in the prophet Ezekiel's vision of the valley of the dry bones.

Simmering under the surface and then like a volcano erupting and bursting forth, it give us some of the Old Testaments most iconic verses;

*"The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me, because the LORD has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor."* (Isaiah 61:1) In a famous sermon at Nazareth, Jesus used these very words, and applied them to himself.

*"And afterward, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions."* (Joel 2: 28) How church today needs such a sense of the vision of God!

*"So he said to me, "This is the word of the LORD to Zerubbabel: 'Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit,' says the LORD Almighty." (Zechariah 4:6) How often do we continue to seek the way forward in our own strength, using only our mind, our eyes and our plans, instead of seeking the guidance of the spirit of God?*

In the story of the people of God as recorded in Numbers 11, Moses was a man under pressure, there had just been a fire at the camp, and we get a sense of his stress in these words, *"Moses heard the people of every family wailing at the entrance to their tents. The LORD became exceedingly angry, and Moses was troubled. <sup>11</sup> He asked the LORD, "Why have you brought this trouble on your servant? What have I done to displease you that you put the burden of all these people on me? <sup>12</sup> Did I conceive all these people? Did I give them birth? Why do you tell me to carry them in my arms, as a nurse carries an infant, to the land you promised on oath to their ancestors? <sup>13</sup> Where can I get meat for all these people? They keep wailing to me, 'Give us meat to eat!' <sup>14</sup> I cannot carry all these people by myself; the burden is too heavy for me."*

On one level this is story of shared responsibility through the formation of a leadership team, who would take some of the burden off the shoulders of Moses, but for today, Penetcost, let us focus on how it happened.

These are the words used, *"He took some of the spirit given to Moses and gave it to the seventy leaders". (v25) We might ask,*

what relevance does this ancient story have for us today? The answer is simple; this is the way of God. This is how God works; there is always a movement of the spirit. In these seventy men and at Pentecost in Jerusalem centuries later, it was obvious. But it is not always like that. The work of God by his spirit happens, I believe, even when we are not aware of it. Even when we think we are carrying out our plans and ideas, if it is the vision of God, it can only come by his spirit; if it is the compassion of Christ, it can only come by his spirit. That is how God works, there is no other way. If we believe that God is love, then in every act of love, kindness and justice demonstrated in the world, if God is there, so is his spirit. That is how God works, there is no other way.

We cannot and never will contain the spirit of God. It does indeed blow like the wind, and where it goes we will never truly know, but in its movement, we will see the spirit of God at work. You see that in this story, the spirit could not be confined to the tent; two of the seventy were in the wider camp and they were filled by the spirit of God.

I am not sure why their shouting and prophecy stopped so quickly, but Moses' response to Joshua is interesting. Joshua wants Moses to make them stop them shouting; maybe in response to something new or something he could not understand or control; but note what Moses said; I wish the Lord would give his spirit to all his people! He would have to wait a long time, for the dramatic events of Jerusalem to unfold, for his hope to be fulfilled.

If we are honest, in the Church of Scotland we are not comfortable with the spirit of God, and I am not sure of what we make of Moses words to Joshua; we keep our emotions in check and we often use the head before the heart, but in what other way can God work, but by the movement of his Spirit?

So may our plans for the future be visions given by the Spirit of God; may our acts of compassion be touches of the spirit of Christ upon the lives of others and when we cry for justice may the spirit speak through the still small voice of God. Amen.