

Sermon preached at Gisborne, 12 June 2022

Empowering God, we pray that you will send your Holy Spirit to move us to understanding; to help us to believe the gospel; to give us strength and wisdom to live by it. Amen.

Romans 5:1-5, John 16:12-15

The work of the Holy Spirit

(Watch the video “The Power of words”)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QYcXTIGLUgE> (for 1 min 38 seconds)

Change your words and change your world! You may wonder what this video clip has to do with the work of the Holy Spirit – the theme for today. If plain words can change people’s perceptions and, thereby, their actions, how much more can the Holy Spirit do, who, as the word of God, works through a calling, a life-giving, and a sealing work? The readings of John and Romans will help us learn about the work of the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Trinity. The story time story and the video clip will also be part of the discussion.

A calling work

God’s calling has been expressed in different books in the Bible through Proverbs, where Wisdom calls to all, and in Psalms, where the majesty of God is displayed in creation. God has revealed all things through Moses, the prophets and Jesus, but people are not always prepared to understand them. In John 16:12, Jesus says that he has many things to tell them, but they can’t bear them then. He has been with them for about three years, and he has made known to them everything that he has heard from his Father.¹ To see him is to see God.² Yet the disciples simply don’t get it. As they are not ready to bear the burdens ahead, Jesus does not ask the disciples to face such issues now. But he won’t leave them orphaned, as he will send the Spirit who will guide and strengthen them. The Spirit will teach us everything and ‘all that the Father has,’³ and help us grow in our capacity to understand.

¹ John 15:15

² John 14:9

³ John 14:26

We can compare the Spirit's calling work to a wake-up call as it makes us wake up from deep slumber. When we do, we are led into the presence of the Holy God, so ordinary things or events are no longer the same as before. We can't help but praise the Lord. In the story time, the room where disciples pray is described as dark and quiet. Not knowing what to expect, men, women, old people, young people, and animals just wait. The death-like darkness and quietness are, however, totally dispelled by the sound like a rush of a violent wind. People wake up from the deep slumber of sadness and feelings of loss as the wind and the flames fill up their entire being. The sound and flames are other forms of the Holy Spirit that conveys the Word of God consistently with that of the Father and the Son. Indeed the Word makes us alive.

A life-giving work

The Holy Spirit convicts, calls and brings life. The Holy Spirit convicts us by helping us realise that we are sinners and in need of a Saviour. The words 'sinners' or 'a saviour' seem either too religious or distant from one's daily life. In the video clip titled 'the power of the words,' we see a homeless, blind man asking for alms on a busy street with a plea signage.⁴ But nobody seemed to care or help the man out. He caught, however, the attention of a woman passing by. Upon realising the man's unfortunate condition, she wrote something on the back of the man's signage. With the new words written, people started noticing the man, sympathising with him, and extending their generosity by giving him some money. When the woman returned the second time around, the man couldn't help but ask her what she wrote that captured so many people's attention. She replied, "it's a beautiful day, and I can't see it." The new words helped people to be reminded not to take life for granted, as there were others just like the blind man who simply couldn't see how beautiful the day was because of his disability. It reminds us of a story about a man born blind in John 9:1-12 in that Jesus opens the man's eyes which becomes the cause of persecution by the Pharisees. When the disciples ask Jesus, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?"⁵ Jesus answers, "Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God's works might be revealed in him."⁶

By this time, we may wonder who are sinners and who is a saviour in this video. The woman is not a saviour for the blind man but kind enough to help him earn more money than he expected. His life condition didn't change with only one day's help. Will those who showed

⁴ It reads I'm blind, please help.

⁵ John 9:2

⁶ John 9:3

compassion to him on that day continually show him the same attention? In order to get the same effect, the man may need to either change the location or change the phrase to more powerful and effective. It is what the copywriters would do daily to catch our attention so that we can buy the product/service. Therefore the phrase, ‘Change your Words and Change your World’ at the end of the video doesn’t have life in it unless the words are from God. Likewise we are all sinners if we don’t know God, or receive the word of God, believe in Christ Jesus.

The Spirit helps us live by the Word of God, which transforms us into new beings. When we are indifferent to life and forgetful of God’s grace and love, the Spirit reminds us of what we have missed. Acknowledging the work of God in creation is also part of understanding. Identifying sufferings in the world and working to relieve them is another. In this way, the Spirit calls us to participate in the Spirit’s life-giving work together, who also does a sealing work of salvation.

A sealing work

God affirms that part of the work of the Holy Spirit is in sealing our salvation.⁷ In Ephesians 1:13, it reads, “In him you also, when you had heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and had believed in him, were marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit.”⁸ Since we are justified by the grace of God, Paul says, the life of the justified is a mix of peace, hope, suffering, and love.⁹ In this kingdom life, we have peace with God through Jesus Christ, and we receive God’s love through the Holy Spirit.¹⁰ Living in and through the Spirit is how to seal our salvation. In this new life in Christ, sufferings are also differently understood, which is not ‘payback’ for sin but we are becoming godly characters while enduring and overcoming sufferings.

We are left with questions about whether we listen to the Spirit open to newer and deeper understandings of our faith in Christ. What is the Christian response to the world while being true and faithful to Jesus’ revelation? Although science and technology offer us new and exciting ways of viewing and understanding the world, we know that true wisdom comes from knowing and trusting the one true God. In and through the Holy Spirit, we have the Word of

⁷ 2 Corinthians 1:22 -by putting his seal on us and giving us his Spirit in our hearts as a first instalment.

⁸ See also Ephesians 4:30 –“And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with which you were marked with a seal for the day of redemption.”

⁹ Romans 5:1-5

¹⁰ Romans 5:5

God. How would you like to use this new Word today? May God help us be renewed by the Word, always alert by the Holy Spirit and work and live as the faithful body of Christ, today and always. Amen!