**Christians are guided by the Spirit**

In today’s sermon, which is part of our series in the build up to Pentecost, we are going to have a focus on ‘being guided by the Holy Spirit’.

In today’s reading, Paul receives a vision of a man of Macedonia, begging him to travel to Macedonia to help them. We are told that they ‘got ready at once to leave for Macedonia’ as they had interpreted that this is what the vision meant for them to do.

I wonder how many of us can say that we have had a clear vision from God that we have acted on immediately?

Maybe some of us can remember when we have had a strong urge to do something and had no explanation as to why. Maybe visiting someone we haven’t seen for a while or making a phone call. Perhaps you have found yourself in just the right place at the right time to help someone. Maybe you have accredited this to God, and maybe you haven’t. In secular society, we all too easily put these things down to chance, luck or coincidence.

Paul was living in a society and time that was very different to our own, and maybe we could say that it was easier for him to believe that a vision was from God, then we are able to today. So how can we use the book of Acts to teach us how to be guided by the Holy Spirit, to help us ask for, acknowledge and attend to the presence of the Holy Spirit?

Let’s have a look at some of the things we have been taught about the Holy Spirit, so far, in the book of Acts.

If we go back to chapter 1, Jesus tells his disciples to wait in Jerusalem, for a gift from his Father, the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Wait, being the operative word, we would also do well to wait for the Holy Spirit, not acting on our own whims, but acting on the careful discernment of the Spirit. In the busyness of life we can all too often get swept up in things, making quick decisions, and being influenced by all the things going on around us. How often have you acted without taking time to think, then regretted it?

In Isaiah 40.31, we are told that, ‘those who wait for the Lord, will renew their strength’.

In chapter 2, we have Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit is heard like the blowing of a violent wind and then rests upon each of those in the room, like a flame above each head, filling them with the Holy Spirit.

If it seems as those this is the first appearance of the Holy Spirit, then fear not as the author of Acts makes it clear that the Holy Spirit has always been at work, for example, in verse 16, ‘the Holy Spirit spoke long ago, through David’.

Those filled with the Holy Spirit then behave in such a way that it catches the attention of all those gathered in the city. Speaking in languages that they did not know, so that everyone could hear the gospel in their own language.

Later, when Peter has explained what has happened and has shared the gospel message, people ask him what they should do in response to what they have seen and heard, he tells them to repent and be baptised, then they will receive the Holy Spirit.

In chapter 4, after praying for God’s help, the believers are filled with the Holy Spirit which enables them to speak boldly.

In chapter 5, we are told that God has given the Holy Spirit to those who obey him (verse 32).

In chapter 7, the those who are opposing the gospel message are accused of resisting the Holy Spirit (verse 5).

In chapter 8, those who have been baptised do not receive the Holy Spirit until Peter and John lay their hands on them.

Then we come to Saul’s conversion, he hears a voice, Ananias has a vision, then Saul receives the Holy spirit by the laying on of hands.

From these events, I believe that we can see a pattern in how we can become more attuned to the Holy Spirit.

We must wait,

we must repent, (we need to have pure hearts and a clear conscience)

we must pray, (petitioning and listening)

we must obey.

Only through these activities will you know if your guidance comes from God.

When Paul received his vision of the Macedonian man, he had no doubt that it was from God. Paul had been waiting on God to guide him, he was active in his worship, repenting and teaching repentance, he prayed, and he obeyed the teachings of Jesus. When Paul received the vision, it was likely to have been in response to his petitions to God for guidance. He was a prayerful man who had no doubt that he was doing the will of God and who sought the will of God. In verse 6 of chapter 16 we are told that Paul and Silas were kept from preaching in Asia, by the Holy Spirit. This guidance of the Spirit was something that Paul was constantly paying attention to.

If he had been in any doubt, he was proved right by the events in his time there, the conversion of Lydia and the part she played in building the church in Macedonia.

It can be hard to be as certain as Paul is recorded as being in the book of Acts, maybe he did have doubts at the time, and they weren’t recorded? However, what is recorded is that Paul followed the guidance given to him and was successful in converting many new believers and building many worshiping communities across the world.

We must take heart from this, we must allow ourselves to be guided by the Holy Spirit, to do the will of God.

I want to share a final passage of scripture with you today, and a thought.

Acts 5. 38-39, ‘Therefore, in the present case I advise you: leave these men alone! Let them go! For if their purpose or activity is of human origin, it will fail. But if it is from God, you will not be able to stop these men; you will only find yourselves fighting against God.’

If what we are being guided to do is of God, it will not fail, so do not fear failure, do not hesitate or hold back, wait on the Holy Spirit, pray for the Holy Spirit to be with you and to guide you, then obey the Holy Spirit.

Let us pray…

Come Holy Spirit,

be among us we pray.

Guide us in our daily lives,

to do your will and not our own.

Help us to be open to your gently nudging’s,

opening us up to opportunities to further your kingdom here on earth.

In Jesus name we pray. Amen