

FOCUS ON FAITH

PROMISES, PROMISES

How many times have you had someone let you down? They've said they'd do something and fail to do it or agreed meet up with you and they don't arrive - on time or even not at all!

Often it's a case of over-promising but under-delivering, and of course it works both ways. I wonder how many of us have yet to make good on those Christmas card promises to call or meet up with that person we write to every year yet haven't seen for ages?

There are many promises in the Bible. God says he will never leave us or forsake us; that his promises are faithful, true and everlasting and that whenever we call on him he will always answer, just to mention three.

And Jesus made a promise to his disciples which this weekend many Christians will be remembering. After his death on the cross that first Easter and following His miraculous resurrection, Jesus spent another 40 more days on earth with his closest friends. During that period he was preparing them for the time when he would return to heaven. And just before he did, he told them to wait in Jerusalem for the arrival of his gift to them - the Holy Spirit.

Just for a moment can you put yourself in the shoes (or perhaps I should say sandals) of the Disciples? They had seen and heard some fantastic things during the 3 years they'd been with Jesus.

- People had been healed from all sorts of physical, emotional and mental traumas; some had even been brought back to life again.
- There had been miracles over nature - storms had been calmed; Jesus (and briefly Peter) had walked on water.
- The Disciples had been given real life examples in showing compassion and kindness, practical service and provision for people's physical, emotional and spiritual needs.

Jesus did seem to have a knack of doing things differently from the norm.

Their leader and mentor tells them He's going to fulfil an earlier promise He had made to them. He'd told them previously (see John's Gospel 5: 5-15) that He'd send someone else to help them - someone who'd be with them all the time and everywhere they went. "Has Jesus lost the plot?" could possibly have been their reaction.

Jesus did seem to have a knack of doing things differently from the norm. I'm sure the Disciples would have been pretty confused and the Bible tells us they were scared out of their wits and locked themselves away.

But suddenly out of nowhere they are filled with an inner strength and assurance so that they are able to go out into the middle of a vast crowd to tell them about Jesus. Three thousand people became Christians that day and the Church was born.

Who or what made the difference? Why did Peter (remember he was the one who said he would stand by Jesus even in death yet cowardly denied him three times) become the fearless campaigner and ambassador for God? Jesus had kept His promise to send them His power - the Holy Spirit.

But what's that got to do with us today?

As Preb. Clive Williams says in his Prayer for the Week, perhaps our reaction is similar - that the Holy Spirit is someone many of us find a little confusing and perhaps frightening. In fact in many Bible translations He's referred to as the 'Holy Ghost' and many of us are apprehensive about ghosts!

However the Bible tells us that the Holy Spirit is not someone we should be scared of. He's our counsellor and guide, He's the one who challenges us when we step out of line with God's will and purposes but also that He acts on our behalf and intercedes for us.

As I've said before in this column, Christianity isn't just for young kids and grannies. It's a dynamic, power-filled faith that demands our total commitment. The Church was born when the Holy Spirit filled frightened individuals with courage to stand up and declare the truth about Jesus and He can do the same today.

This weekend many of the Christian churches in the area will be celebrating their 'birthday party' and remembering how it all started.

If you'd like to find out how to join in, log onto www.lifting-jesus-higher.org.uk where you'll find links to websites and contact information.



Stephen G. Derges
Elder & Worship
Pastor,
Bridgnorth Baptist
Church