

FOUR LAST SERMONS: TWO

Sermon for 31 5 20, Pentecost, Yr A
St Peter's Limpsfield, streamed Eucharist
Acts 2:1-21; John 7:37-39

Gut feelings and the Holy Spirit

My question for this morning is: What has your gut feeling got to do with the Holy Spirit? Not much, you might think; but really quite a lot, says the bible. Let me try to unfold a bit of this intimate and powerful mystery for us all...

The Spirit is there from the very beginning, brooding over the face of the deep. The Holy Spirit is at work in all creation. But in John's gospel, the Spirit comes in a special way for the church only after Jesus' death and resurrection. As Peter declares, from the prophet Joel, it is poured out on all flesh; but we find salvation in calling on the name of the Lord, through the gift and power of the Holy Spirit.

In the light of what's known as the charismatic renewal, a Dominican monk called Simon Tugwell wrote a book in 1972 called *'Did you receive the Spirit?'* There is a simple answer to this question: if you are christened, that is, if you are baptised, then yes - you have

received the spirit. As Christians, we receive it through our christening, our baptism.

There are lots of images for the Holy Spirit: fire, dove, wind. But the one that comes to the fore in today's gospel is less well-known, and that is water.

Bible scholars are divided about whether the living water in our gospel reading today is flowing from Jesus, or from the believer. But from the early Christian tradition, the Spirit is definitely linked with the water of baptism. I'm only sorry that I can't sprinkle you today to celebrate! As you may know it has been one of my favourite parts of this strange and wonderful job!

And the other thing that is clear is that, though in our modern translations we read of the living water flowing out of the believer's 'heart', the original Greek word literally means 'belly.'

In the Hebrew tradition in which our Christian faith is rooted, the Spirit of God works in us not so much through our hearts and our heads as through our guts.

If you've wondered whether this mysterious Holy Spirit is really for you - please be reassured - it is! And it is closer and more present to you than you might think. Your gut feeling is as sure a sign of the Spirit as the pictures of and encounters with the fire, the dove, the wind and the tongues of the Spirit.

And though perhaps none of us quite understand the language of our gut feeling, it is a language we can all recognise, as long as we don't brush it away by over-thinking it or dismissing it.

Some scientists have even found that our gut works like a mini-brain! Like first impressions, our gut feelings can be wrong. But part of God's invitation to us is to cultivate a good climate in ourselves, so that we can better notice and rely on these promptings of the Spirit deep within us.

Sometimes that can be uncomfortable. The Holy Spirit does comfort us; but it also challenges us. If God is really that close to us, then God is likely to be asking things of us as well as giving things to us.

I have a final saxophone gift for you today, as a voluntary which seemed suitable on this Festival day of the Holy Spirit, the wind, breath and life-giving force of God. Enemy of Apathy.

That gift was not well-received in my old church actually; music was in a narrower domain there. So thank you for your openness to it. It has been a joy to share the saxophone with you.

I came here to Limpsfield as a young man - or a younger man - and, after a while, saw visions, including one inspired by a young child. I am getting

ready to leave as an older man (by 7 1/2 years, anyhow!), and I will continue to dream dreams, and to pray, for the future life and work of St Peter's.

One of the things that gives me most hope for the future of the church is the many unsung acts of kindness and service to others in and through our church community. As Paul reminds us over three chapters (12 - 14) of his first letter to the church in Corinth, these acts of the Holy Spirit are every bit as valuable, or even more valuable than, any public pyrotechnics.

As we celebrate in this strange time the outpouring of the Holy Spirit again through the church, and in all creation, God help us to cultivate and recognise the promptings of the Spirit in our gut feelings. And may that living water bless, sustain and guide us always.

Amen.