

From a complex jigsaw puzzle to a good sudoku. From a personal goal to a conundrum that really needs puzzling away at, we can all appreciate the value of a challenge. A challenge brings opportunity for development and growth, for change of heart and attitude and for a new thing beginning that will potentially have long-lasting benefit. A challenge is an effort, either an effort of person, patience, endurance or exertion. Perhaps you can relate to this owing to particular events or situations in your personal or family life in recent times.

Today, we will baptise 4 people who have committed to embrace the challenge of the Christian life, and with it the challenge of discovering the help and assistance that only comes from the Holy Spirit — which is a tall order indeed, especially in such a self-sufficient era that we are currently in and living through with great recourse to personal resources for strength and resilience.

Peter, on the day of Pentecost embraces the challenges that are piling up before him. He has heard the criticisms of the people who are looking askance at the excitement of the people speaking loudly and boldly in other languages, accusing them behind snide hands of public drunkenness and disorderly behaviour. Peter hears it — like so many people do when rumours and meanness is being levelled at the and their family and friends... He also has a clarity about who he is, both his role and purpose. Will he skulk in the shadows or will he choose to not let that moment of denial be his defining characteristic and become known as an apostle of the kerygma? One who stand and preaches the good news of Jesus with the boldness and authority for which Jesus himself had previously been known?

FF Bruce points out that Peter firstly addresses the accusation of public drunkenness — which would have been a handy little rumour to perpetuate, even if it was really meant in jest similar to the phrase ‘happy clappy’ which is sometimes used today as a cynical disparagement of upbeat worship. Peter demolishes the argument against drunkenness with 3 simple observations and statements

These people are not drunk

As you suppose

It's only 9 o'clock in the morning

We talked a little bit last week about Peter calling them out. And that Peter should do this is good. Calling people to account for their wrongdoings and wrongheadedness with regard to the things of God and the people of God is paramount.

Having claimed the space and told the critics that ‘he sees them’, Peter goes on to the most impactful part of his sermon. He draws on the scriptures belonging to the people and quotes the imminence of the prophecy of Joel. Using the lived experience of the people around him as a sermon illustration, he draws attention to the familiar phrases.

Acts 2:16-18 NIV

[16] No, this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel: [17] “ ‘In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams. [18] Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy.

Look at that NO at the beginning of verse 16! The Holy spirit's life —says Peter— is being poured out on all people - the people from all the nations, from all backgrounds, from all faith traditions. They will be drawn to Jesus and in his presence, by his spirit, they will be baptised with water and with fire. John the Baptist reminded the people of this.

Luke 3:15-16 NIV

[15] The people were waiting expectantly and were all wondering in their hearts if John might possibly be the Messiah. [16] John answered them all, “I baptize you with water. But one who is more powerful than I will come, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.

We still baptise with water. Jesus commands this of his followers as part of the task of making disciples

Matthew 28:18-20 NIV

[18] Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. [19] Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, [20] and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

The baptisms we offer and make, the baptisms we surrender to today will mark the church's involvement in the ministry of the Trinity as we fulfill Jesus' command. The baptism of new life will be received and a new life of discipleship will begin -- or a continued walk of discipleship but with the new dimension of being received into the body of Christ where together, we are little brothers and sisters of Jesus. It is a mark of discipleship that we choose baptism. That we receive in, a public way the duties and joys of Christian Living.

Peter declares that the time of fiery baptism is also here. Baptism that releases gifts and extends the mission of God beyond the borders of religion out into the world. This is why Galilean fishermen's speech can be understood by people from Cappadocia and Crete.

Peter declares the age of fulfilment and the release of the church to break out in fresh hope to do what Jesus has called them to until the end of the age!!

So we are thankful that the story continues with understanding, wisdom and prophetic leadership, gracious engagement with the gospel up to and beyond today.

Henry, Aiden, James and Sebastian will be baptised. Henry and Rhema will be confirmed. Siaha will be dedicated by her parents. God's family is growing for our blessing and the salvation of the community in Jesus' name. Amen.