

Article for newsletter for 9th June 2019

It's Pentecost! The birthday of the Church. Imagine 1986 candles on a cake each one representing a million lives saved and won for Jesus.

When the Holy Spirit was poured out on the first disciples all those years ago, who could have imagined the impact it would have had on the world? Yet nearly two thousand years later, nearly two and a quarter billion people in the world identify themselves as Christians, and that includes almost 456 million evangelicals who are growing at a rate of 2.6% a year.

Now, I'm not opposed to enjoyment, in fact when I used to lead people in worship I would sometimes say to them that if they didn't enjoy praising and worshipping God, then maybe He didn't enjoy it either! However, the Holy Spirit was never given primarily so we could enjoy ourselves. In fact, if being filled with the Spirit leads us only into a warm, closer encounter with God (which it does) *and nothing else*, then there is a danger of us becoming spiritually complacent: self-centred, even. No! The Holy Spirit was poured out so we could become powerful, effective, joyful, loving witnesses of the fact that Jesus, who died to save the world, is alive and longs to be a vital part of our lives, thrusting us out into the world to proclaim the coming of His Kingdom; to restore broken lives; to heal damaged relationships; to transform us and the communities in which we live.

In Mark 4:35-36 we read of Jesus, with His disciples, leaving the crowds and crossing to the other side of the lake. Sometimes God wants to uproot us and take us to the other side maybe of the city, or of the country - or even to the other side of the world. And as you read on, it wasn't plain sailing! They encountered a storm so fierce that it terrified experienced, weather-beaten fishermen - yet Jesus was with them. In His grace, Jesus responded to their fear, yet in fact His presence was enough. And it seems that their whole journey on this occasion was just to minister to one demented, demon-possessed man. But what an encounter, what power, what transformation! So much so that it filled the locals with fear and they begged Jesus to leave them alone. Well, He did in a sense: but He left the restored man there to tell his story and introduce others to Jesus. And hasn't He done the same for us?

In our country, where 8.8% of the population are evangelical Christians, maybe God is telling you to "go to the other side" and minister to others, just like the Nekounams have done: they have gone to where only 0.7% of the population are Christians. And, as a result, if only one person is transformed by the power and love of Jesus, who knows what the ultimate outcome will be? Just follow Him and do what he tells you.

Steve Reading

(Facts and figures from www.operationworld.org)