

Continuing the series that we doing called "Walking the Talk". We had "Walking with Jesus" a couple of weeks ago, and then last week we had Fr Sam and he came and did "Walking with Others" (which was great and I thought very challenging), this week is "Walking in the Spirit", next week will be "Walking in the Light", and then the final one of the series will be "Walking Together", so we're in the middle of it. So reading from Galatians and it's from chapter 5 verses 16 to 26.

{Reading Galatians 5:16-26] It's challenging stuff!

I'm going to go back a little bit – I want to talk about the Old Testament and some of the ways in which God appeared and manifested his presence on the earth. In the Old Testament the divine presence of God is depicted in various ways, we have: the burning bush from Exodus which also later comes as a wall of fire in Zechariah's prophecy; we have the pillars of smoke and fire which led the people out of Egypt and then around in the desert; and then we have a cloud, we see this cloud when Moses pitched the tent outside the Israelite camp, or in middle of the camp, and in the wilderness where he convened with God and where he interceded on behalf of the Israelite people; when the Lord spoke to Moses the Lord would come down and speak to him face to face but through a Cloud, and he spoke to him as though speaking to a friend – and that's a little bit strange that he had to speak to him through a cloud but he did speak to him as a friend – but he spoke to him through a cloud because we see this later on in in Exodus: Moses asked to see God's face (and we were just thinking about that: we're gathering to seek God's face), but the Lord denied Moses' request, he said "you can't see my face for no one may see me and live!" And this is because the Glory of God was too great for human eyes to gaze upon and survive, and so he had to appear in his various forms: this fire in a burning bush, a pillar of smoke and fire, and as a cloud. When Moses asked to see God's face instead the Lord hid Moses in a cleft in the rock and said "So shall it be while my glory passes by I will put you in the cleft of the rock and you will not see it from the front, you will see my goodness, you'll see my back."

All these appearances of God's Glory – his manifestations of his presence – troubled the Jewish Rabbis so much they had to come up with a word to describe it – and it's not a word that comes from scripture – it's this word, it's "Shekinah Glory", and it's defined like this: it's a visible manifestation of God on earth whose presence is portrayed through a natural occurrence. These were not imaginary things that happened, these were true events that are spoken of in scripture. The word *Shekinah* is a Hebrew word meaning "dwelling" or "one who dwells". So Shekinah Glory means "he caused to dwell"; he caused his presence – the divine presence of God – to dwell upon the earth. And this might, for those of you who know your scripture and in particular your New Testament scripture, remind you of John 1:14 where it talks of Jesus and how he made his dwelling among us. The origin of the word *Shekinah* comes from the Hebrew word שָׁכַן (*Shekan*) which means "to reside" or "to permanently stay".

But none of these appearances – none of these manifestations – were permanent were they? In fact even Jesus' life on the earth was not permanent – the 30 years he resided on the earth. So if Shekinah Glory speaks of as desire of God to Reside and to permanently stay then it must speak to something more than just these manifestations, and even to just more than just the life of Jesus, because the inauguration of time itself the Lord had ordained to indwell his people, meaning whoever comes to faith in Christ. For God who said "Let light shine out of darkness" made his light

shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. God has shone this glory, this light, into our hearts and caused it to permanently stay by the indwelling of his Spirit.

Jesus' earthly ministry is the ultimate demonstration of God's Shekinah Glory, God's divine presence. But in Christ all the fullness of the deity lives in bodily form and you have been given fullness in Christ who is the head over every power and authority. In as much as God's divine presence appeared in the fire in the burning bush and the pillar of smoke and in the cloud, and in the fire and in the cloud which shone on the temple, his divine presence indwelt Jesus Christ. All the fullness of the deity – the father, the son and the Holy Spirit – all of it indwelt Christ, and he gives it to his church, he gives it to us! And more than that, Jesus was made to be both God and human in one person, 'cause if it were not so it would be difficult for us to identify with him and it would be impossible for him to find solidarity with us. He was made to be human so that he could bring about the embodiment of our redemption in his flesh. This is what it says in Hebrews: He was obligated in all things to be made like his brothers and sisters that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make atonement for the sins of his people, for in that he himself suffered being tempted he's able to help those who are tempted even though he was God he was tempted as human and therefore we can identify with him just as he identified with us. Because in Jesus' flesh the separation of humanity from God was resolved. And in his price that he paid (which Alf so eloquently spoke about this morning) the price for our sins was paid and the separation of all humanity from God was ultimately and conclusively redeemed – the wall of separation that was depicted in the temple behind which was the Holy of Holies, where God's Shekinah Glory came down to shine upon the mercy seat, the wall was torn down and God's Glory came forth from the temple and is now available for any who come to faith in Christ. I think that's amazing!

And when we were singing at the end there about seeing God's promise finally, fully, conclusively consummated, that hangs upon us because God's done his part – it's now only upon us to come to God and to ask for this glory because the veil been taken down. This is how Paul described it: we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord glory, are being transformed into his image with ever increasing glory which comes from the Lord who is the Spirit – it doesn't come from us, it doesn't come from me, it comes from the Lord still desiring to demonstrate his divine presence on the earth but no longer to do it through a burning bush, or a pillar of smoke and fire, or a cloud in the temple, but to do it through people. He desires to express his glory, his divine presence, through us just as much as he did through Jesus, but how much more so could he do it through a room full of us than he did through one man – looking around there's lots of people in this room. If his glory was pouring forth from us how much could that change the world? 'Cause his glory as it transforms us goes forth into the world to transform the world.

We are a Baptist Church, aren't we? We are a Baptist Church. We were talking about being led by the Spirit and we're talking about not doing the things that we don't want to do, and doing the things that we know that we should do – we're talking about turning away from doing things that are the way of the world and towards doing things that are the way of God. And there's only one way that this comes about. Paul in his first letter to the Corinthians spoke about their forefathers, the Israelites, and said they all passed through the river, they were all baptised into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, and he's talking about the Red Sea and also the Jordan River. But he connects this in the passage with temptation; he brings it to the point at the end where it says no temptation has seized you beyond that which is common to all humankind. We're all tempted in the same way, and we're all tempted in the same way that Jesus was saved, and it says but you

will not be tempted beyond that which you can bear because God is faithful and he's provided a way out – when you are tempted he provides you a way out – and that way out is through the Spirit; the same Spirit through whom Jesus when he was on the Earth was able to remain sinless. We've been given everything that we need in order to live this new covenant life, to carry out the mission of God, and it's not about being super spiritual, it's just about being led by the Spirit, and walking in the Spirit, and living by the Spirit. The pillars of cloud and fire that we spoke about, these are referenced by John the Baptist when he speaks about Jesus, he says I baptise with water but one who is coming he is mightier than I am is coming, the straps of whose sandals I'm not worthy to untie, he will baptise you with the Holy Spirit and with fire.

This clearly suggests a New Testament democratisation or the making available to everybody, of God's divine presence which Jesus further promised at the end of Luke's gospel and at the beginning of Acts: he said go wait in Jerusalem for God's Spirit to fall upon you; which is what they did. And we're not talking about two baptisms, we're not talking about there's a baptism into Moses, there's a baptism into the John the Baptist; we're not talking about two baptisms into Jesus. But I believe there's two parts to the baptism. When I got baptised I went into Teen Challenge and after about ten days there was a baptism Sunday coming up at the church (it was a Baptist church in Ilford: High Road Baptist church) and I hadn't been baptised but I had been confirmed in the Church of England so I didn't think I needed to be baptised. But then someone said to me “Why do you think that?” And I didn't really have a good answer. So I put my name down to be baptised, but at the same time we were being taught about these words that Jesus speaks about being baptised in the Holy Spirit and with fire. And it was explained to me that we baptise in water, when we baptise in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, that's our part, but Jesus' part is to baptise us with the Holy Spirit and with fire. And these are one in the same because when we come to be baptised we demonstrate and profess our faith. And God has already promised to pour out his glory, pour out his Spirit on those who come to him in faith. So therefore this is available to us. And I ended up having the experience of being baptised in the Spirit a couple of days on the Friday before being baptised on the Sunday. But in my mind those two things are inextricably linked: they're part and parcel of the same experience which is me coming to God in faith, expressing my faith in Jesus, and asking for God to come and help me to live right – which is what I needed.

We can't live right without the Spirit – it's not possible. Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness and he was tempted which means as the writer of Hebrews says “We do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weakness, but we have one who has been tempted in every way.” Not just in *some* ways, he was tempted in every way! All of these that I read about here: the acts of the sinful nature – Jesus was tested with these. But Jesus was led by the Spirit. He did not sin. So therefore it's possible for us if we are led by the Spirit and are walking in the Spirit to resist sin by the power of Spirit.

It's also possible for us if we're being led by the Spirit and the walking in the Spirit to do all the things that we need to do and are required of us for God's mission on the earth, because it is on us, the church. A friend of mine at a church I used to go to in Chelmsford used to say “there's no Plan B” and he was right. And as I was preparing for this I was reminded of a sermon I heard by a man called Carter Conlon who preaches at Times Square Church in New York, and he spoke about his experience of being led by the Spirit in this way. And this is akin to, if you like, Elijah's experience of not the fire, or the cloud, or the earthquake but the whisper, the whisper of the Holy Spirit. When you're walking down the road and the Holy Spirit whispers something for you to do, and Carter Conlon's whisper was that he was walking down the road and he saw a homeless

guy, and he just come to faith in the Lord and he'd given up his job and he didn't have a lot of money, he had maybe \$50 in his pocket but the Lord asked him to give the homeless man the \$50. And he said he just kept walking – so he kept walking, he walked past the homeless man and he was still walking, and he felt this rubber band start to tighten because he hadn't obeyed, and he kept going, and the further he kept going the more tight it got, 'til he eventually turned around and he came back, and he went to the man and he gave the man the \$50, and the man just broke down in tears because he's been contemplating taking his own life, and this one act of kindness on the part of Carter Conlon – just by being obedient to the Spirit – changed that completely. The man ended up coming to Carter Conlon's church (it was a different church) but he started coming to see Carter Conlon at the church and Carter Conlon brought into faith in Christ.

And I was sharing this story with somebody in a week and they told me a better illustration so I'm going to elevate it: This was an equivalent story of a missionary husband and wife. They were driving through Afghanistan giving Bibles to people and they saw a soldier on the side of the road with a gun, and the wife said to her husband “I really feel the Lord's telling me that you've got give him this Bible.” And the husband said “I don't want to give him the Bible! And he's got a gun. And he's a Muslim! So I don't want to do that!” and he didn't. And they got in the car and they started driving. And they were driving 20 miles and the wife kept saying “The Lord wanted you to give him the Bible!” The man resisted for 20 months but then eventually he gave up and they turned around and they went back, and they drove back, and they stopped. He got out and he took his Bible, and took it up to the man with the gun at the side of the road and gave it to him. And just the same as the homeless man broke down in tears. And the husband said to him “Why you crying?” And he said “Because I was told, I was given a prophecy three days ago that I had to come here to this place where I would be given the words of life. And I've been here three days waiting and now you've done it.”

That's what it's like being led by the Spirit. We have to be attuned to what the Spirit is whispering to us because when we do that we will bring the divine presence of God to people on the earth. And this comes through two things when we think about the Spirit: on the one hand you have gifts – gifts of the Spirit come to us instantaneously when we receive the Spirit, and they speak of spiritual capabilities, such as giving words of knowledge (which was the equivalent of the story) or wisdom or Prophecy, speaking in tongues, interpretation of tongues, healing, faith – but then on the other hand you have the fruit of the Spirit – and the fruit of the Spirit is the spiritual character which develops gradually, and that's what it's talking about in the passage where it says love, peace, patience, kindness, goodness – and both of these are necessary.

This is an illustration I've used before but these come about by us, just at the passage said (in verse 26), keeping in step with the Spirit, led by the Spirit, walking with Spirit but keeping in step with the Spirit; and I like to think of it as a dance: I like to think of it is that the Holy Spirit is leading the dance and it's upon us to follow the lead, and when we do that it's something which becomes something which is beautiful, spiritually it's graceful, spiritually. When we keep in step and we dance to God's tune but also when we dance with each other, and when we keep in step with each other, when we seek unity rather than division, when we seek community rather than isolation. And when we do that we'll fulfil what Jesus said: “A new command I give you love one another...” (the fruit of the spirit) “...as I have loved you so you must love one another. By this all men and women will know that you are my disciples if you love one another.”