

Read Isaiah 11.1 – 3

***A shoot shall come out from the stock of Jesse,
and a branch shall grow out of his roots.***

***The spirit of the Lord shall rest on him,
the spirit of wisdom and understanding,
the spirit of counsel and might,
the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord.
His delight shall be in the fear of the Lord.***

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My name is Brian Hilsley and I am the Minister of Aberlady and Gullane Parish Churches, part of the Church of Scotland. Thank you for tuning in to this Reflection for Pentecost Sunday, 31st May 2020. Alongside this video you should find two others; one with the Biblical account of Pentecost found in Chapter Two of the Acts of the Apostles and the other with prayers for Pentecost Sunday. I hope and pray that you will find blessing here from God.

Yesterday saw the first day of a slight easing of the Lockdown restrictions here in Scotland and families and friends were able to get together for the first time in months, albeit outside and still maintaining social distancing. My wife and I had our 8-month-old granddaughter and her parents with us, and we enjoyed that more than I can say. Said granddaughter is named SOFIA which ties in very nicely with the theme of my reflection today.

“Give a man a fish and you will feed him for one day; teach him how to fish and you will feed him for a lifetime.”

That piece of wisdom is in common currency and has been around for a long time. It has lasted because it captures a truth that is both simple and profound; and it captures it in a memorable phrase which anyone can understand.

“Give a man a fish and you will feed him for one day; teach him how to fish and you will feed him for a lifetime.”

According to my reading the saying originates with a man, mostly known as Maimonides. Maimonides was born in Cordoba in what is now Spain in the Middle Ages. He was, what is known as a Sephardi Jew; Sephardi denoting his Iberian origins. During Maimonides' early life Judaism was tolerated by the Muslim rulers of Spain but, in time, persecution began, and Maimonides eventually crossed over the Africa, where he spent time in Morocco before going to the Middle East. An acclaimed expert in the Torah – the Jewish Law --- he was also a pre-eminent physician, astronomer and philosopher. It was because of his acknowledged wisdom that Maimonides was respected by Jews, Christians and Muslims alike --- his wisdom enabled him to cross cultural and religious divides – building bridges of understanding.

Pause

In today's short passage from The Prophecy of Isaiah we read words with which Maimonides would have been very familiar. The prophet foretells the day when a Son of David will be raised up and endowed with the Holy Spirit of God – in which will be wisdom, understanding, counsel, might and the knowledge and fear [in other words honouring] of the Lord.

For Christians, passages such as these are, of course, foundational in the understanding that Jesus is the Messiah --- then one promised and sent of God. Within these verses there is also a key element of Jewish and Christian understanding --- that the Spirit of God encapsulates the wisdom of God --- which divine wisdom is so praised and honoured in other parts of the Old Testament. In Greek – the word used for this divine wisdom is SOFIA.

Over recent weeks we have noted that the Gospels tell us that as he prepared to depart from them – in other words as the physical resurrection appearances came to an end ----- Jesus both promised his disciples that God would send the Holy Spirit of God to them --- and counselled them that they must wait for the Spirit to come to them before they did anything else in his name.

Pentecost --- often cited as the birthday of the Christian Church – remembers and celebrates that day – the day the Holy Spirit came --- and some of the established Jewish images of the Holy Spirit --- fire and wind --- feature prominently in the account. And – most importantly I

believe --- the two immediate consequences of the arrival of the Holy Spirit --- are AMAZEMENT and MUTUAL UNDERSTANDING. Everyone was amazed at what happened --- and at the heart of their amazement was the fact that there occurred a whole new degree of mutual understanding --- given witness in the fact that all language barriers were overcome – language barriers which also denoted differences of race and religion.

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Last week – in the Sunday Club Zoom Meeting --- we were thinking again about the Fruit of the Spirit ---- and I challenged the children to try to remember the nine characteristics of the Holy Spirit – which they looked at last summer. The list is found in the final verses of Chapter 5 of Galatians.

LOVE, JOY, PEACE, PATIENCE, KINDNESS, GENEROSITY, FAITHFULNESS, GENTLENESS AND SELF CONTROL.

Paul's list is not exclusive --- but it emphasises that when the Holy Spirit of God is at work in us because of our welcome to it – then these characteristics will be evident in our lives.

LOVE, JOY, PEACE, PATIENCE, KINDNESS, GENEROSITY, FAITHFULNESS, GENTLENESS AND SELF CONTROL.

And – of course --- these are essential companions to – indeed components of WISDOM. SOFIA. It is my invariable experience that wherever and whenever I encounter true wisdom – then these other qualities and virtues are strongly influential. Wisdom is never loud or overbearing; it is never reckless or intolerant; it is invariably gentle, kind and HUMBLE. [How much our world needs humility.]

Wisdom then --- is the equivalent of --- it is another name – for the Holy Spirit of God --- and as was seen in Maimonides --- that Spirit of God – that divine WISDOM BUILDS BRIDGES --- it works to achieve MUTUAL UNDERSTANDING. And wherever and whenever that occurs – it is truly AMAZING.

Today – above all days --- we remember the Christian conviction that in God AMAZING THINGS ARE POSSIBLE --- life as God intends it is made real --- when God's Holy Spirit rules in our lives. I encourage you with all my heart to embrace that truth and to open your heart today and every day to God's Holy Spirit --- which waits in every moment of every day --- to be welcomed in.

May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen