

A Pentecostal Problem

Acts 2:1-21

If I was to use the phrase, "Houston, we have a problem!" put your hand up if you know what I'm talking about.

So, for those who are looking at me blankly, it's a line from the movie Apollo 13. The crew are up in their space craft and everything seems to be going swimmingly, but then there's an explosion, the space ship shakes and Tom Hanks radios back to ground control with the words: "Houston, we have a problem!"

Back in the olden days it became a pop culture meme before memes existed. Whenever something didn't go quite right . . . particularly something trivial . . . someone was bound to put on an accent and say: "Houston, we have a problem".

As you can imagine, there were no shortage of opportunities to use the line . . . there's always problems . . . health problems . . . money problems . . . relationship problems . . . faith problems . . . work problems . . . church problems. I haven't met too many people who have got through life without problems . . . always problems.

And, it's always been that way . . . look at the disciples in Jesus' day . . . they had problems . . . the threat of been locked up . . . flogged . . . even killed . . . like Jesus . . . no wonder they stayed indoors . . . behind locked doors. But, then, they faced an even greater problem . . . Jesus was gone . . . resurrected, but gone . . . ascended into heaven . . . and, so, they're left . . . wondering what to do next . . . wondering what will happen next . . . waiting for God to act.

And, God does act . . . in an amazing way . . . he pours out the Holy Spirit on the disciples . . . he starts the church . . . it's something new . . . a new start for them . . . a new life for them . . . and they hear the sound of a violent, rushing wind . . . they see tongues like fire resting on their heads . . . and they begin to speak in other languages, proclaiming boldly what God had done through Jesus. It's all very mind-blowing . . . incredible . . . powerful . . . and they might have been forgiven for believing now, finally, all their problems were over . . . now, finally, everything would be all right.

And, we, today, as we celebrate this extraordinary event we call Pentecost . . . we might be forgiven for thinking . . . as many do . . . that Pentecost is just about deliverance, celebration, victory . . . strength . . . power!

But, this morning, I want to suggest a different response to these amazing events . . . our response on this Pentecost Sunday . . . as we relive God's powerful action in creating the church by the Holy Spirit . . . as we hear about the rushing wind, the tongues of fire . . . the cacophony of voices . . . our response might rightly be: "Houston . . . we have a problem!"

Yes . . . we have a problem! You see, the Holy Spirit doesn't come to solve our problems . . . he comes and *creates* a problem!

Let me say that again: the Holy Spirit doesn't solve our problems, he creates a problem for us.

Look at the disciples . . . when Jesus ascended into heaven, if it wasn't for the Holy Spirit they

might have drifted back to their old lives . . . their old occupations . . . same old comfortable stuff . . . they might have looked back on the wild ride of the previous three years with fondness . . . that Jesus really was a amazing bloke, but it's good we got that out of our system . . . now we can go back to normal life. But, when the Holy Spirit comes the old, normal life is not an option . . . instead, they're launched out into the world . . . out behind the safety of the walls . . . out into the big bad world with an unlikely message about an itinerant preacher from the back-blocks of Palestine who's God's Son . . . who is the way, the truth and the life.

And, so it has been since then . . . that's what the Holy Spirit continues to do in the church and with the church . . . calling us into the faith then sending us out into the world to proclaim Jesus . . . to talk about Jesus . . . to tell the world that Jesus lives!

Now, can you see why we have a problem?

No, the problem is not that we don't know what to do . . . or what to say . . . we do . . . we know . . . the Holy Spirit gives us the words . . . that's his promise.

And, the problem is not that we have to talk about Jesus . . . as if it's some demand, or expectation God places on us . . . that's not it . . . the problem is we can't help but talk about Jesus . . . because that's what the Holy Spirit does . . . he points to Jesus . . . and when we have been given the gift of the Holy Spirit there's something inside us that can't help but point to Jesus. That's the problem!

Have I got you puzzled? Doesn't sound too bad, does it . . . can't help talking about Jesus! Where's the problem? The problem is not that we can't talk about Jesus, the problem is we don't! Isn't that right . . . we don't do it! There's this inner battle . . . this conflict . . . within us . . . where our selfish, sinful nature says: I just want everything to be all right . . . to be normal . . . I just don't want any hassles . . . no problems . . . I want everything to go my way . . . and I can't really trust things will be all right if I totally commit to Jesus . . . I need to keep some control . . . I want to choose how, and when, I express my faith . . . and whatever I do, I don't want to make a fool of myself doing it!

Then, there's the Holy Spirit working in our hearts saying: you are the most precious person to Jesus . . . he is your Saviour . . . he is everything . . . he is with you . . . he will never give up on you . . . and there's something about Jesus being with you that defies description . . . it's love . . . amazing love . . . love so deep that you just have to say something . . . to somebody . . . you just can't keep it to yourself.

That's our problem. We're caught between our old life and our new life . . . between God's will and our own will.

So, what's the answer? We always want an answer to problems, don't we? A solution. But, to this problem - as with many others - there is no answer that will fix the problem, or make it go away . . . that's just how the baptismal life is . . . it's the life of being a saint and a sinner at the same time . . . it's the life of faith. The only thing to do is to keep receiving God's grace . . . the body and blood of Jesus . . . keeping receiving the forgiveness of sins spoken in the absolution, or by a fellow Christian . . . forgiveness for when *our* will overpowers the Spirit's leading . . . keep hanging onto the promise of God in baptism . . . keep praying . . . keep hearing God's word . . . keep being involved in a Christian community.

And in amongst our inner battle the Holy Spirit will keep working . . . she can't help it. She won't solve our problems, but she works through problems . . . our problems . . . the church's

problems . . . the world's problems . . . and in the problems she always gives us hope . . .
because the Spirit always points to Jesus . . . the Holy Spirit is our guarantee of Jesus' presence
with us . . . and Jesus' presence means resurrection always follows crucifixion . . . life always
follows death . . . that's the message we get to share . . . in Christ, life always follows death . . .
that's the message that keeps interrupting our 'me-centred', finite lives.

Houston, we have a problem . . . the Holy Spirit won't leave us alone.

And, thank God for that!

Amen.

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Pentecost, 2026