



Acts 2:1-4

TITLE

OPTIONAL OR ESSENTIAL?

OPTIONAL EXTRAS

We'll all be familiar that when we come to buy anything expensive we are often sold things that come as optional extras.

DEFINITION

Something that might be useful if you can afford it but not essential.

PICTURES OF OPTIONAL EXTRAS

Cars are best known for offering optional extras. Here are some of the most sought after optional extras.

CHURCH - AN OPTIONAL EXTRA?

Something I have heard a lot since coming to Felixstowe is that many Christians in this town regard church and going to church strictly on the list of options for what Christians should do. Attitudes tend to divide into two extremes.

I DON'T NEED TO GO TO CHURCH

A characteristic of this church and many churches in town is that we can almost instantly think of people who once used to be very active members of this church or other churches but who now attend no church at all. People leave churches for many reasons, but the saddest reason that I hear is that people think that they can be a Christian without going to church. Behind that is usually a negative experience of church, however they came by that. But can someone grow and thrive as a Christian and not be part of a church? As we look at God's word we find a straightforward answer: no.

WE ARE NOT HERE TO PROMOTE CHURCH

This is another quite low view of church that I've often heard pushed around in Felixstowe. These folk say we should encourage people to come to faith and encourage mission activity between churches (nothing wrong with that), but when it comes to promoting our own church, we shouldn't do that. Christianity is about people coming to faith, not about trying to grow church. Hmm. Interesting. I wonder what the Bible has to say about the importance of church.

OPTIONAL OR ESSENTIAL?

Is church an optional extra for believers which we pick up and drop as suits. Or is it essential? Let's roll it all back to the start, and when we get there we find that church is important enough to have a festival of its own – Pentecost.

PENTECOST – SHAVVOT

Pentecost derives from the Greek word for 50. It occurs 50 days after Passover and was and is a Jewish feast called Shavout which is usually known in English as the Feast of Weeks and was a celebration of the first fruits of the harvest. It is a beginning of summer feast when people recognise when the first summer crops come in that God has given them to us. For Jews it was a celebration of the giving of the Law, the Torah to them at Mount Sinai. It was the giving of the Law and the acceptance of the covenant that made Israel the people of God. As a nation it was a significant day.

PENTECOST CHRISTIAN

Pentecost is a significant day for Christians which is why we observe it. We read a few verses from Acts 2 which records for us the way the Holy Spirit was poured out upon the disciples – amazing things followed – read the book of Acts for more details. Two principle things happened as a result of the Spirit being poured out on them. Firstly, they received power, power that transformed lives, power that worked through them in miracles,

words that had an amazing effect on people – all because the Holy Spirit was now working through them. Just as the Jews received the Law at Sinai, the disciples received the presence of the Spirit. The second was that they were forged into a new body, the body of Christ. The Greek word for what they were called is *ekklesia*, a group drawn together for a purpose – the church. *Ekklesia* is about drawing together: the church operated first as a group and then as groups as they spread out over the world. Virtually everything we learn about Christian life and witness, or about behaviour is always in the context of the group.

So what can we learn about what the Church is.

1. IT IS GOD-BREATHED

Here's what the disciples were commanded to do by Jesus after His resurrection:

ACTS 1:4-5

On one occasion when He was eating with them, he gave them the command: "Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard Me speak about. For John baptised with water, but in a few days you will be baptised in the Holy Spirit.

ACTS 2:2 Then we read this

Suddenly there was a noise from the sky which sounded like a strong wind blowing, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting.

Sometimes the Lord gives signs of His presence. Wind and Fire are two used of the Holy Spirit and in the room that day there was the sound of wind and the presence of flames. Incidentally, before you think a tornado swept through the room and then fire came, don't let your imagination go to far. If they weren't blown away with the rushing wind they would surely be torched by the fire. No, they got the sound of wind to signify the arrival of the Spirit and they saw what looked like flames – to signify the power of the Spirit resting on them.

The Spirit's arrival is signified by the sound of a rushing wind, a violent wind. A rushing wind isn't a breeze, it's the sound of a gale - a tornado. Gales are powerful and here the Spirit arrives in power. They were immersed in the Holy Spirit. In Hebrew, the word for spirit is *ruach*, breath or wind. The word for wind in Greek is the same as spirit - *pneuma*.

As I've already said, the word sound is used as there had been a real wind, none of them would have lived to tell the tale! The Spirit is about power. Not the random and destructive force that a gale or tornado is. It's a deliberate force, under control - you know He's there because of the sound generated, but His life-changing effect on people is deliberate and focussed. Its a picture often used of the Holy Spirit. You can't see wind but you can see it's effects. It's the same with the Spirit. You can't see Him, but we can sure see His effects.

But He's breath too. Breathing keeps us alive. One of the most basic first aid skills is the kiss of life – breathing into someone to oxygenate their lungs. The Holy Spirit gives each person coming to Jesus the breath of life – He makes them alive. The church of God, the Body of Christ was Spirit breathed – He has given it life. Why is church important? Because it's given to us and the Spirit has breathed life into it.

2. IT IS EMPOWERED BY THE SPIRIT

The disciples didn't just receive something living and amazing that day, they received power. Here was Jesus' promise to them before he ascended.

ACTS 1:8

You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you: and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.

And what happened?

ACTS 2:3-4

Then they saw what looked like tongues of fire, which spread out and touched each person there. They were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to talk in other languages, as the Spirit enabled them to speak.

What are tongues of fire? When a fire burns the flames rise out of the fire and often flames flare up. And when flames flare, the fire gets transferred from the fire to whatever the flames touch. Here we see the Spirit being revealed to the disciples as flames and the flames flared up and touched each one of them.

The same applies as with wind. They saw what looked like flames but they weren't torched. The Holy Spirit brings fire, but not the randomness of a wildfire or the spite of an arsonist, but a fire that was deliberate and focussed too.

The Fire of God had set these disciples on fire too. Not literally, but in the way we still use the phrase – he seems on fire for the Lord, she's on fire for Jesus! We often get a picture in Scripture of fire as a cleansing power – burning out dross but the emphasis is not on cleansing here, but again on empowerment. These people were all fired up by the power of the Holy Spirit - that fire change them radically. They went on that day to be the vehicle of change for 3000 people that day.

It is the Holy Spirit that fires us people for Jesus. The problem is that we often let the fire burn low in our lives. Worse, we let it burn low in the church. Knowing now that the church is Holy Spirit breathed and Holy Spirit empowered, why do some Christians have such a low opinion of it. Because we have allowed ourselves to forget what it's all about. We cease to breathe in what God has for us, and we stand away from the fire and allow ourselves to go cold. Here's one last point

3. IT IS APPOINTED BY THE SPIRIT

Let me read you a couple of verses from
1 CORINTHIANS 12:12-13

Christ is like a single body, which has many parts; it is still one body, even though it is made up of different parts. In the same way, all of us, whether Jews or Gentiles, whether slaves or free, have been baptised into the one body by the same Spirit, and we have all been given the one Spirit to drink.

We have been immersed by the Spirit into one body. We don't join the church, the Spirit joins us with it. It's a simple principle. *Ekklesia* is a people who have been drawn together. We are part of the church of God whether we like it or not. I can't choose to opt out of it and I don't opt into it. I'm part of it. All of us in Christ are. Bodies are living things. They grow. The only place to grow as a Christian is as part of the church of God. There is no such thing as a lone ranger in God's church.

And we know that God appoints local churches. Therefore it follows that God makes people part of local churches too, because they are his. So rather than we being good modern 21st Century people and exercising our choice whether or not we are involved in church and shopping around for a church we like and moving churches when we feel we want to, God calls us to be a part of the body and we function and grow best where we have been called to. If we're in the wrong place or not there at all, we don't grow, we don't know God's blessing. If we don't play our part where God has called us for whatever reason then we suffer and the church suffers. I don't have time to explore that today but I've preached on it before.

ESSENTIAL

Church therefore is God given, Holy Spirit breathed, Holy Spirit empowered. If it's all that we take it seriously as the place we are going to grow and thrive as God's people. What's the best formula for this? It reflects the wind and fire of the Holy Spirit we read about this morning.

Just as the Spirit's breath came, we breathe words of life and hope to those who don't know Jesus. We are called to bring life and hope. That's the mission of Church. That's the mission of the local church. Lose focus on that and what are we bringing if we don't bring life? Death?

We should act according to His power. The Holy Spirit brought fire. How fired up are we? Look at the stories of the early church in the Acts. God's people were on fire and that fire spread to others. They grew and thrived and others came as a result. Where's our fire?

TITLE

In a few moments we are going to sing a song what has the words "send the fire". Maybe this morning you've realised that your fire has gone out a bit – perhaps you've never felt particularly ignited. God wants us to be ignited and empowered by the Holy Spirit. That's good, and scriptural and should be our prayer.

If we know Jesus as Saviour and Lord, we all have the Holy Spirit within us, but how brightly does His fire burn in us? David Watson once illustrated the work of the Holy Spirit within us by comparing His work in us to one of those old water heaters. Rather than electric starts which the modern ones have, old heaters needed a flame in them which burned all the time – the pilot light. It was just there and gave very little heat out. But when the heater was turned on, it burst into life.

This Pentecost, let's examine ourselves. Do we still burn with the fire of the Spirit – a fire of enthusiasm for the things of God, a fire to reach others, a fire to see God glorified in my life, an expectation of the manifestation of

the Spirit's power in the church, an expectation of glory?

Yes? Then good, but pray that the Spirit will just turn the heat up full blast.

Maybe though the Spirit is a just a pilot light. You want things to happen, you'd like things to happen. If that's the case, ask God for a fresh infilling of the Holy Spirit. Come Holy Spirit, let Your fire burn in Your people!

*Preached by Mark Reid
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Bible Reading:
Acts 2:1-4



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Acts 2:1-4

When the day of Pentecost came, all the believers were gathered together in one place.

Suddenly there was a noise from the sky which sounded like a strong wind blowing, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting



Bible Reading:
Acts 2:1-4

Then they saw what looked like tongues of fire which spread out and touched each person there. They were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to talk in other languages, as the Spirit enabled them to speak.




Optional or Essential?

Optional Extra

Something that might be worth getting if you can afford it but not essential




HOLD YOU BE INTERESTED IN ADDING A FEW OPTIONS?




Optional or Essential?

Church: An Optional Extra for Christians?



The Birthday of the Church

Acts 1:8

You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."



The Birthday of the Church

Then they saw what looked like tongues of fire which spread out and touched each person there. They were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to talk in other languages, as the Spirit enabled them to speak.



The Birthday of the Church

It is God-breathed

It is empowered by the Spirit

It is appointed by the Spirit



The Birthday of the Church

1 Corinthians 12:12-13

Christ is like a single body, which has many parts; it is still one body, even though it is made up of different parts. In the same way, all of us, whether Jews or Gentiles, whether slaves or free, have been baptized into the one body by the same Spirit, and we have all been given the one Spirit to drink.



Essential!

We are all in the Church so

we should bring life and hope by the Spirit

we should act according to His power

