

Filled with the Spirit's power, with one accord
the infant church confessed its risen Lord:
O Holy Spirit, in the church today
no less your power of fellowship display.

A favourite tippie of many, and no doubt with the merry, merry wives of Windsor, is champagne. A good champagne, measured in dryness, is called BRUT, from the Dutch *broug*, meaning, dry. I tend to think of too much champagne with the Scottish understanding of *brute*, too much, and you're not dry, but a beast!

Is it any wonder, having seen the disciples after the manifestation of the Spirit that the crowd mocked them, suggesting that their joy and enthusiasm was mistaken for being drunk? The thing about champagne, and even beer, is the carbonated nature of the drink. The bubbles actually intensify the effects of the alcohol by accelerating within our bodies absorption. This is why it is used as a drink to get parties started.

Then, again, it was not *brut* that was being alluded to by the crowds. It was *gleukos*: unfermented extra-sweet wine! They were drunk on sparkling grape juice! The mocking they were getting was not as Peter answered, but rather, they were acting as if they were on the good stuff, even though it was only 9 in the morning! Too much sugar!

Those of us with experience of children should be able to be nodding at this point. Dose them up with red cordial and chocolate and send them home: a parent's worst nightmare!

So, lest I be accused of suggesting the disciples were on a sugar-high and out of control, fear not. Unfermented new wine was full of effervescence. It would seem the same could be said of the disciples once they received the gift of the Holy Spirit!

Jesus, in Matthew 9:14–17, Mark 2:21–22, and Luke 5:33–39 points out that placing of new wine in old skins is not wise. The reason is this: new wine will burst the old skins as the process of fermentation takes hold. New wine goes into new skins. Now...the symbolism of what is happening here is starting to take effect. Ahh, Jesus, you've done it again!

The Spirit is not given to the *old skin* of the Pharisees and the Sadducees: they couldn't take it. It would destroy them. They who set out to stop this very thing happening, would not cope with the sending of the *new wine*. The new sweet spirit of God that will bubble out and bring joy to all people.

The Holy Spirit was given the new wine skins, the next and new generation, in a way that it would not burst the containers, but rather, bubble out like the nectar of sweet wine as it was poured onto the wounds of a broken and divided world.

Is all this talk of new wine leaving you thirsty? Well, in moderation, abstain for now: the best is yet to come, as Jesus alluded to at a Wedding Feast in Cana, in a rather interesting wedding scandal involving some 1400 litres of town water!

The effervescent disciples, completely intoxicated on the new wine with no alcohol, begin to bubble away in such a way that the message of God's love for all humanity was heard in every known tongue. This message of God's love, seen by some as the healing of the Tower of Babel incident when confusion reigned as the tongues of all communities were confused, was overturned by the sending of God's Spirit to the disciples. "How is it that we hear all in our native tongues?" they asked. This was the fulfilment of the Messianic dream that drew

all people to himself; and that Jesus was indeed the light to enlighten ALL NATIONS, and to be the glory of God's chosen, Israel.

The notion of being *filled with the Spirit* is found in many parts of the Hebrew Scriptures, as well as in the New Testament.

Ephesians 5.18 Paul writes "Do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but *be filled with the Spirit.*"

In John 17, Jesus said, " ³⁹ Now ^ethis he said about the Spirit, ^fwhom those who believed in him were to receive, ^gfor as yet the Spirit had not been ^hgiven, ⁱbecause Jesus was not yet glorified.

Today, we celebrate that in the sending of the Holy Spirit, Jesus was fully glorified.

Following the great commission to continue what Jesus started, *baptising in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, remembering that Christ is with us always* Paul's advice to the Corinthians also bears fruit: ¹³ For ^kin one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—^lJews or Greeks, slaves⁴ or free—and ^mall were made to drink of one Spirit." (1 Cor 12.13)

The one universal message begins with the high spirits of the disciples, apparently high as kites on new wine, 50 days after the Passover. For 7 weeks, the disciples mourned the death of Jesus, were prepared to receive the Spirit that was promised: the one that was to comfort, equip and send them forth into the world.

It was on the first day of the week after the perfect celebration of the Passover that the new day truly dawned. God with us, Immanuel, born into poverty, carrying out the divine commission of Isaiah 61, crucified, dead and buried, was now fully resurrected, ascended, and with us to the end of time.

No wonder their joy was overwhelming for the disciples!

The Spirit of the Lord breathed new life in the dry bones of the defeated armies of Israel before the very eyes of Ezekiel. The same Spirit hovered over the void responding to the Word of God and brought forth all things into being. The Spirit of God was on Jesus as we picked up the mantle of the new Jerusalem as the Jews returned from the *diaspora* and were once again free.

The spirit of the Lord God is upon me,
because the Lord has anointed me;
he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed,
to bind up the broken-hearted,
to proclaim liberty to the captives,
and release to the prisoners;
² to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour,
and the day of vengeance of our God;
to comfort all who mourn...

The new day had indeed arrived. Picking up with what we heard from Luke in the beginning of the Acts of the Apostles, we are, as the body of Christ, commissioned and sent forth to carry on the business of achieving what Jesus began. And we are to do so, for by the very act of our anointing by the Holy Spirit at our baptism, it is our joy and duty.

- There are still people who are oppressed.
There are many who are broken-hearted who require the gifts of healing and wholeness;
- There are people who are captive who should be let free – and I think not that much further north of here than to bring to mind the names of the islands *Manus and Nauru*, together with the irony of the island named *Christmas*;
- The release of prisoners held captive by not only their circumstances beyond their control, but the nature of substance abuse, discrimination on the basis of gender and sexuality, and cruelty at the greed of others;
- To proclaim the 50th day and year: the jubilee in which all debts are removed;
- To bring comfort to those who mourn.

Another beautiful image is that of being an *oak of righteousness*. A single acorn into a mighty oak grows. It just takes something small for something enormous to take root and grow.

Today, friends, that something small is the bubbles of new wine of the Holy Spirit being poured into our souls. To receive this gift, this is a gift from God that is freely given and is to be freely received.

It may compel us to be agents of change. It may compel us to put our lives on the line – literally or socially. It may bubble out of us incoherently or as gentle as a dove alighting on the shoulders of Jesus at his baptism. It is a gift to us that is freely bestowed.

And the good news, we have the autonomy to accept and use it, or not. Jesus said of the Spirit,
“The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes”.

So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit. (John 3.8).

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Great words we sing out today, but using the same tune, I’d like to remind you of what we sang at my induction.

**Take up the song, and sing the praise of God,
who gave the power of choice to humankind,
that we might rule the earth through servanthood,
and so find joy in all that God designed.**¹

May this joy in God’s love be in you most complete and free-flowing, that people may mock us for being drunk at an early time, when, as we give thanks, we overflow with the Spirit of God’s love and blessing, and indeed, find joy in all that God has designed.

¹ *Rae E. Whitney (b1927)*