

PENTECOST

31st May 2020

Bible Reading Acts 2.1-21 'The coming of the Holy Spirit'

When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages as the Spirit gave them ability.

The followers of Jesus were all together in one place. Wouldn't it be good if we could be, too?! At least we can separately share in the celebration of Pentecost today.

The Pentecost story is set in Jerusalem where Judean Jews lived but people had gathered from all the known world on a pilgrimage for their religious festival, 50 days after Passover. Suddenly there was the rush of a violent wind and the followers of Jesus spoke in the different languages of the people present. Barriers of language and culture, status and religion, gender and age get blown away by the wind of the Spirit and made no longer significant by the life-saving deeds of Jesus Christ. This surprising divine power makes itself known through the common and mundane, through ordinary people going about their lives.

The Spirit comes with wind and fire, those universal elements of creation that can power energy and heat but also cause destruction. God's Spirit is not something that we can tame, but it always works in accordance with God's will to bring life out of death, hope from despair. Peter, the fisherman turned rock of the church, preaches, disputing the assumption he and the others are drunk. He reminds his hearers in the prophet Amos God said the Spirit would be poured out on all people, from the least to the greatest. This amazing example of divine *inclusion* furthers the ministry of Jesus who cared for the common people and the vulnerable, he who was a carpenter Messiah out of Nazareth.

The wind of the Spirit certainly does blow where it wills and we may be perplexed and astounded and confounded and confused at the sound of it, then and now. Who wants to hear the visions of young girls with no life experience or the dreams of old men who won't live long to see the future? Yet they may well teach us of God's goodness and grace. The incarnation of Jesus and the pouring out of the Spirit show us that nothing in all the world: illness or even death can separate us from the love of God, and that all people regardless of race, colour, creed, age, health or gender are worthy of respect and deserve dignity. We are indeed in this God-created and redeemed world together, whether we want to be or not. And God's plan is to renew it, restore it to the harmony and wholeness of its initial intention.

During these days of restricted movement and Zoom meetings, I am grateful the Spirit does not need to practice social distancing. And while the sameness of so many of these hours, weeks and months gets disorienting and disheartening, it is wonderful that God's Spirit works through people to bring healing and hope where people are lonely and frustrated.

A neighbour runs out of milk and their next-door neighbour pick some up for them when doing their own shopping. Human kindness and friendship bring a sense of companionship.

A church Elder goes walking for exercise and regularly stops to knock on the doors of those who are vulnerable – and taking a step back when they answer – asks how they are doing and has a chat. Friendliness and kindness bring longed for human contact and support.

Many people have offered to be volunteers, to help those in isolation or shielding and are building a wonderful sense of community.

Those who have been homeless in St Ives have been housed at the Dolphin Hotel. Housing those who were living on streets during the lockdown has been so successful that the government is planning to build new housing for those people when lockdown ends.

If we listen, we might be able to hear the gentle breezes of God's Spirit bringing social justice and healing in our world and also gives us hope in the knowledge that the spread of the virus is reducing and soon we will be able once again to gather for worship and fellowship.

Prayer

Loving God, fill us anew with your Holy Spirit,
enable us to speak your words of comfort and hope to those who are down and discouraged,
encourage us to be your hands and feet to serve others as we are able,
and give us energy and incentive to continue your work of grace and goodness in our community. In Jesus' name we pray. AMEN.

Further thought and Action

When have you had an experience of the Holy Spirit?

1. Where have you sensed the Spirit at work during this time when we are experiencing forced changes in how we do things?
2. What image of the Holy Spirit is most meaningful for you? Wind? Flame? Dove? Advocate? Comforter?
3. What boundaries is the Spirit pushing you to expand or break down?

4. How can you mark Pentecost this Sunday from wherever you are worshipping?
Are there things you can do to make Pentecost memorable this year when many of us cannot be together in one place?