

Sermon for Pentecost 28 May 2023 Cathedral, Isle of Man. The Revd Ruth Walker

Readings: Acts 2: 1-21

2 When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. **2** 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. **3** Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. **4** All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.

5 Now there were devout Jews from every people under heaven living in Jerusalem. **6** And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each. **7** Amazed and astonished, they asked, "Are not all these who are speaking Galileans?" **8** And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language? **9** Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, **10** Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, **11** Cretans and Arabs—in our own languages we hear them speaking about God's deeds of power." **12** All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, "What does this mean?" **13** But others sneered and said, "They are filled with new wine."

Peter Addresses the Crowd

14 But Peter, standing with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed them, "Fellow Jews^(a) and all who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and listen to what I say. **15** Indeed, these are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only nine o'clock in the morning. **16** No, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel:

17 'In the last days it will be, God declares,
that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh,
and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,
and your young men shall see visions,
and your old men shall dream dreams.

18 Even upon my slaves, both men and women,
in those days I will pour out my Spirit,
and they shall prophesy.

19 And I will show portents in the heaven above
and signs on the earth below,
blood, and fire, and smoky mist.

20 The sun shall be turned to darkness
and the moon to blood,

before the coming of the Lord's great and glorious day.

21 Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.'

John 20:19-23

19 When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors were locked where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with

you.”²⁰ After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord.²¹ Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.”²² When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit.²³ If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.”

Locked room? Or out on the streets?

(Prayer)

Just look at the difference in the disciples before receiving the Holy Spirit and after!!

If we are honest, are we sometimes a little like the frightened disciples who had locked themselves in their room?

Does it feel as if our faith gets locked inside our heads? Locked inside the church on Sunday?

Does it feel as if we're tongue tied...unable to speak about God to anyone...a bit wary of some of those supernatural gifts the Bible speaks of in I Corinthians 12?

Are we perplexed by the story of Pentecost, like some of those who were watching the disciples?

Maybe not sneering, but a little wary of those who talk about the power of the Holy Spirit?

Does Pentecost seem either a distant event, or make us feel just a little uneasy?

That's a lot of questions!! But if some apply to you, it might be good to not ignore them, but pray about them and probably talk to someone you trust too...

I thought it might be helpful to

1. start with a very brief summary (or a reminder) of some of the work of the Holy Spirit before Pentecost

And

2. Look at the significance of Pentecost as recorded in Acts for us today.

It's maybe good to know that the Hebrew word we often see used for Spirit, Ruach, is at different times translated as Breath or Wind, as well as Spirit, and they can be interchangeable.

As we look at different events, notice the strong links with creativity and bringing life.

And how the Spirit is closely linked with Breath and Words and Speech...about relationships and communication...

(That reminds me about the power of our own words...to bring life or death to situations (Prov 18:21).

And it sparks a prayer for the Holy Spirit to keep on nudging me about what I say and what I shouldn't say...)

Bearing those things in mind:

A quick tour through the Bible: The Holy Spirit does not just appear at Pentecost!

The Spirit of God is there in the very beginning, in Genesis 1, where we read that a wind, or the Spirit of God, moved over the face of the waters, at creation (Gen 1: 2)

God gives life to humanity by "breathing in the Spirit (Gen 2:7)

The Spirit is on Moses and a share given to the Elders who assisted him in leading the Israelites (Numbers 11).

The Spirit enabled some to have special artistic gifts, for creating beautiful objects in the construction of the sanctuary, in the Tent of Meeting (Ex 31).

Numerous Judges and Prophets in the Old (and New) Testament were filled with the Spirit of God in order to speak words of wisdom, challenge, warning, comfort and hope, to the Israelites, as they tussled with learning how to live as God's chosen people. They spoke words which would lead to LIFE.

King Saul and King David most notably were anointed with God's Spirit (I Samuel 15 and 16) to model His LIFE to those they led...even with their imperfections.

The most significant New Testament event I'm sure you remember: Mary is said to be "with child from the Holy Spirit" (Matt 1:18,Luke 1:35).

And when Mary visits her cousin Elizabeth, carrying John the Baptist, we read that Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit as she heard Mary's greeting (Luke 1:41) causing her to speak out and declare that Mary is "Blessed among women" as is " the fruit of her womb".

Zechariah is filled with the Holy Spirit after his months of being mute, and prophesies over the future of his son John the Baptist, with the words we know as the Benedictus (Luke 1:67).

Don't forget the leading by the Spirit and the prophesies of Simeon and Anna when Jesus is brought to the Temple as a babe. (Luke 2:25-38)

And the Holy Spirit is seen to descend upon Jesus at his baptism (Luke 3:22).

After the Resurrection, Jesus begins to prepare the disciples for Pentecost when He breathes on them saying "Receive the Holy Spirit" (see the Gospel reading.)

To sum up a big theme so far: Usually, before Pentecost, God's Spirit was given to specific people, but it did not necessarily stay with those people-it was an anointing for a specific time/task.

The purpose of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost.

The difference after Pentecost, is the offer of the ongoing presence of God's Spirit with us, always, for anyone.

Fire representing God's presence was seen at the calling of Moses to lead the Israelites: he goes to investigate the Burning Bush (Exodus 3) and encounters God.

Remember it was a pillar of fire which led the Israelites at night (Exodus 13) after they had escaped from Egypt.

But now, at Pentecost, as Jesus promised, and as the prophets had expressed, God's presence is made available to all ... all who call on the name of the Lord... (John 14:15-17 and Acts 2:21)

The fire is now divided and depicted as *individual flames*...the offer of *individual relationship with God*...His presence with us...

And again, that link with Speech

The disciples weren't given the Holy Spirit to just make them feel comforted and help them get over Jesus leaving earth at The Ascension. (Although Jesus does refer to the Spirit as Comforter and Helper).

The initial effect was to get the disciples OUT of their locked room, and out, into the streets!

Background information

The feast of Pentecost was for the Jewish people a Harvest Festival. Pentecost means 50th...it was a celebration of a harvest 50 days after Passover.

Jewish Pilgrims from many different countries had gathered in Jerusalem. The disciples suddenly found they were able to speak in new languages so that all those people, gathered for the festival, ***miraculously heard of God's Gift for everyone! The new Harvest!***

And then, Peter so ***confidently preaches*** the risen Jesus as the long awaited Messiah...

And NOT just words...but words which led to those gathered WANTING to respond...asking "What should we do.???" ..and being told to Repent...meaning to TURN around their thinking...and to be baptised and receive the Holy Spirit themselves...a gift for all generations to come...

A message that was life bringing...

And a message and gift that is ***still*** available to us today...

The Holy Spirit teaches us and nudges us...moves us toward change...

We say in the Creed "We believe in the Holy Spirit...the Lord, ***the giver of life...***"

So now, Pentecost is significant for a different sort of harvest....a harvest of people turning to God, believing in the work of Jesus and receiving and living with the Holy Spirit!

The gifts which the Holy Spirit can give are many and varied...as you would expect from a Creative God!

But they are always for building up the church...not for personal ego trips...and not everyone can have everything!!

Some are more unusual, but surely we can trust God will give us what He knows is needed in our circumstances...for our growth and for the benefit of others...

The Harvest of lives depending on God will gradually be what is described as the Fruit of the Spirit...(Gal 5).

Love Joy Peace Patience Kindness Generosity Faithfulness Gentleness and Self-Control.

St Paul reminds us that we can have many gifts but unless we have Love ...we are nothing (I Cor 13:2)

My closing suggestion...

today's liturgy (the words of our service) are rich with helping us understand the significance of Pentecost for ourselves, today...

So you might want to spend some time preparing yourselves, in the silence and during Communion, for the words of the Commissioning at the end of our service, where we are asked if we "dare to walk into God's future, empowered by the Holy Spirit, trusting him to be our guide?"

And if you didn't receive anointing and prayer earlier and on reflection, think you would like to...there can be another opportunity for this after the service...we will be available in the South Transept, on my left.

Or if anyone isn't baptised or confirmed and wants to discuss that...please do talk to someone. Sometimes the re-telling of the events of Pentecost can stir us to consider taking such steps.

So now, as I close, I pray:

Come Holy Spirit...keep on filling the hearts of your people.

And kindle in us the fire of your love. Amen

