

Sunday 5th June 2022
Pentecost (C)

Liverpool Parish Church

NT: Acts 2.1-21
NT: Romans 8.14-17
G: John 14.8-17

They were all together in one place..

So today we celebrate Pentecost. We remember the Holy Spirit poured out to first Century disciples and also poured out to us today, inviting us to collaborate in building God's kingdom here on earth. This year, as Pentecost falls on the Queen's Platinum Jubilee and we receive the gift of a double bank holiday, let us take some time to remember the gift of the Holy Spirit and also the faith of our Queen.

The Bible provides so few details of the ministry of Jesus and his disciples, so when such details are given we can be assured that some significance is intended. When some of those who witnessed the wonders of that first Pentecost morning suggested that the disciples were drunk, Peter's defence was that they weren't because it was only the third hour of the day, which is about 9:00am. At the literal level, Peter was drawing his hearers' attention to the fact that on festival days, the Jews didn't start eating and drinking until their morning devotions were over, which was about midday. But there is a deeper significance to the timing of Pentecost than this. Jesus was crucified at the third hour, now at the third hour sent down His grace- the Holy Spirit.

In other words, there is a direct link between the Pentecostal grace which was poured out upon the disciples and the suffering and death of Jesus on the cross. Jesus tells Philip in our Gospel this morning that God will provide them with an Advocate- the Holy Spirit. Jesus reassures Philip and reassures us that the Holy Spirit teaches us and reminds us of all that Jesus has taught us. Faith and prayer can bring about the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

There is never a time when faith and prayer are not necessary, or when it is wrong to pray for an outpouring of the gifts of the Holy Spirit, but perhaps we could say that they are needed now more than ever. Our Monarch, the Queen and Head of our church has demonstrated her faith and integrity throughout her reign and is open about her faith in all that she does.

However, turn on the news or scroll through social media and in America we hear about children being shot, we hear about the war in the Ukraine, in this country we hear about politicians lacking integrity, the rise of the cost of living, of the increasing dependency upon foodbanks- the list goes on. We need an outpouring of the Holy Spirit today.

When the Holy Spirit appeared at that first Pentecost- the Bible describes this divine event unfolding before the eyes of the disciples and those who were watching. As the Holy Spirit descended on the lives of the ordinary people- they were amazed and astonished.

So I wonder what God was up to that first Pentecost when a sign of God's coming Holy Spirit was that people spoke in different languages? Let's think about it, those first disciples had been through a traumatic event - they'd seen Jesus crucified, and they'd rejoiced at his resurrection, they had witnessed his ascension, and there they were - in an upper room in the city of Jerusalem all together in one place- waiting.

The upper room had been quite a significant place for Jesus and his disciples- they gathered there the night before he died, after he'd risen from the dead and now the disciples receive an outpouring of the Holy Spirit. I visited the Cenacle in Liverpool last month for a quiet day and the Cenacle literally means- the upper room. I have a poem called The Cenacle which I will read to you at the end of my sermon which beautifully reinforces the significance of the disciples gathering in the upper room.

And on that day of Pentecost, God's ancient prophecies were fulfilled and down came the fire of the Holy Spirit with a loud sound, which filled their house. Not surprisingly people gathered to see what was going on - well you would wouldn't you? They were people from all over the world and from different cultures, some of them visitors to the city who found themselves addressed in their own languages! "Aren't these all Galileans? How come we're hearing them talk in our various mother tongues?" There's a long list of the languages they suddenly began to speak, in Acts 2: and they all said: "They're speaking our languages, describing God's deeds of power"

From that point the Christians went out and spoke boldly about God's actions. They saw him change and transform communities, bringing healing and wholeness. Someone has said that the real miracle of Pentecost is not so much a miracle of speaking, but a miracle of hearing, that the Good News was heard and understood in the mother tongue of each one who gathered that day. But have you ever wondered why they spoke so many different languages? If you think about it, if God had just wanted the people gathered around to understand what was being said, he could simply have made everyone speak and understand the same language? Why all the different languages? One of the things that Pentecost tells us is that the new community of the Spirit - that now we call the church - celebrates difference, involves everyone and transcends barriers of race, nationality and language. Everyone hears God's works spoken of in their own language. That's significant. When God comes with his Holy Spirit to set the church on fire, he doesn't call us each to speak in the same way or with the same language or to do church in the same way, or to like the same things or be exactly the same as each other. The story of Pentecost tells us that everyone is welcome whatever language you speak, wherever you're from, whatever your story. That is certainly true here in the Parish church where we are inclusive and welcome everyone.

Acts 2 tells us the earliest churches met in homes and in the public worship spaces - and both were important. So, this Pentecost, let's receive again, the Holy Spirit of God. We need that Holy Spirit - to fill all our communications, and to help us to speak boldly of the Good News - to our communities and to the ends of the earth. And to do that we will need the language each of us speaks. The language of commerce and of law, the language of politics, teaching and medicine, the language of care homes and farming and tourism, the language of administration, parenting, the languages of music, poetry, art, sport and industry. We need all the languages and ways of speaking so that everyone will hear of the marvellous works of God who lives and loves and sends and equips and comforts and heals.

When God promises "I will pour out my Spirit on all people", this is not just a few drops on a few people. God wants to open the floodgates of heaven upon all of us. God will empower us and give us what we need. More than we need. Let's ask God to fill us again today with his Spirit's fire, and let's live differently tomorrow because of it. You have been filled with the fire Holy Spirit of God to speak boldly, in many tongues, about the marvellous deeds of God. What began at Pentecost continues - here - today. God calls us to join with him in mobilising all of our different languages, fired and inspired by the power of the Holy Spirit to change the world - one life at a time.

Pentecost represents the inbreaking of God's purposes for all humanity, bringing humanity together in understanding, despite their differences.

I invite you today and this week to pray that ancient prayer: 'Come Holy Spirit'.

Amen

Mthr Jennifer Brady