

Sunday 28 May 2023
Holy Trinity – Holy Communion (8.00am)
Pentecost

Acts 2:1-21

1 Corinthians 12:3b-13

John 20:19-23

Today is Pentecost Sunday and today provides the occasion for Christians around the world to recognise God's Holy Spirit at work in the life of the church and in the lives of believers.

So, what is this day?

Where does it originate?

The word Pentecost comes from a Greek word meaning fiftieth; and on the Christian calendar, Pentecost is the fiftieth day after Christ's resurrection.

We celebrate all this today with images of rushing wind, tongues of flame, and with the breaking down of language barriers to receive the message of the Gospel through the power of the Holy Spirit.

The Christian traditions surrounding Pentecost originate in Acts chapter 2, as we heard just now, where the gathered disciples experience the presence and power of God's Holy Spirit.

The account speaks of a sound "like the rush of a violent wind" and something like "tongues of fire that came to rest on each one of them".

Then we heard that the disciples were "filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages as the Spirit enabled them".

Just as Jesus had promised would happen, the disciples received power from the Holy Spirit to communicate the good news of Jesus Christ and, all the different languages used meant that this was clearly not just a message for the Jews, but for everyone.

The common thread through all today's readings has been the Holy Spirit inspiring renewal and rebirth. The Spirit gives birth to the Church.

It is the Spirit's breath which constantly gives new life to the earth which groans with us and the world in the labour pains of a new creation; and it leads us into truth with new revelations for a new generation.

The Spirit brings hope to a troubled world.

What are we supposed to take from all this?

Well, Pentecost means that Easter isn't just a private affair for Jesus and a few friends. Jesus rose, not for himself alone, but as the front man for an entire new creation.

All of which makes it really clear what the gift of the Holy Spirit to the Church is for.

It is not designed to fill us with religious feelings, or give us unmistakable certainty, or impress others with our power, or even form us into the Church, though it may have all of those effects too.

Rather, it is given primarily to allow the disciples, and all of us, to do what Jesus told us to, which is to be his witnesses 'in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth'.

So the Holy Spirit comes as a breath of fresh air for anyone who wants to breathe in the truth of Jesus Christ. The Spirit is clearly up and running.

But Pentecost still demands a response.

What does it mean today for the Church to be filled with the Holy Spirit?

What difference does it make to live in the Spirit?

The story of Pentecost challenges us to get out of our comfort zone and into the less predictable life that God's Spirit may be pointing us towards.

For, if we are to learn anything from this feast, it is to be open to Spirit of God, which is as dynamic today as it was back at the inception of the Church.

We must listen to the Spirit, interpret what is being said to us today, and be relevant to the world standing outside the Church.

For this is the mission field today. The world needs the message of the risen Christ, the hope that faith offers.

As our hurting and unstable world outside leans in to listen to what we are saying:

Do they hear the Spirit of God, or something else?

What is the message of hope that God is giving us all today, and how can we interpret it into the world.

How is God speaking to each of us through the Spirit that is moving in the world outside of our Church?

What is God whispering to us now and how might we be inspired to call out today and spread the hope and the love that God offers?

Pentecost presents us with an opportunity to consider how we are living each day.

Are we relying on the power of God's Spirit?

Are we an open channel for the Spirit's gifts?

Are we attentive to the guidance of the Holy Spirit?

Are the fruits of the Spirit (love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control), are they growing in our lives?

Most of us live in the presence and power of the Spirit, but only to a limited extent. We tend to be limited by our fear, by our sin, and by our low expectations, not to mention our tendency to be distracted from God's work in us. Pentecost, though, offers us the perfect opportunity to confess our failure to live by the Spirit and to ask the Lord to fill us afresh with his power.

Not just today, but every day can be a small Pentecost for each one of us as we recognise the Spirit in us and among us. Every day we can praise God's deeds of power. Instead of doing much of what we usually do, we can do something different and refreshing. We can look around, consider what's happening around us, and answer some questions.

Questions like...

How is God at work in this situation?

How is God at work among these people?

How is God at work in the circumstances of my own life?

How is God at work in this home, this school, this place of employment, this church, this community, this world?

I said just now that the Spirit is up and running. The question we can't avoid though, is why the Spirit seems only to be "up and dawdling" in the lives of many Christians today.

Certainly, we can imagine the need for the sort of turbocharged start we hear about in our reading from Acts, but the effect of the Spirit may not always be so overwhelming.

Often we give our attention only to what is wrong, what is regrettable, what is dull.

Because of this, we miss ways in which, even now, God is breathing divine breath into the ordinary stuff of ourselves and each other.

We miss ways in which God is practicing the divine art of resurrection.

We miss ways in which the Spirit is trying to lead each one of us gently by the hand.

There's the feeling that we are missing something vital.

Perhaps we could invite God's Spirit - be it ever so tentatively, even today - to blow through the cold, dusty rooms of our lives, and bring us a touch of that glowing life of the Spirit that we see in Acts.

We tend to want to keep religion safely within the bounds of decorum. But without such Spirit filled witness, the light of the Gospel will grow dim and the life of the church will grow weak.

Peter was accused of being drunk when he spoke at Pentecost. Perhaps we ourselves could all do with a bit of that sort of inebriation today.

Amen.