

Pentecost 2020

Today is Pentecost - the Church's birthday - Pentecost is the old Greek and Latin word meaning fifty. Fifty days after Passover – came the Jewish Harvest Festival – Shavout – and this was being celebrated on the day when the disciples were altogether in Jerusalem – and why the city was filled with people gathered from everywhere to take part in the festival.

When Jesus announces the coming of the Holy Spirit he completes the revelation of the Holy Trinity – God the Father sent his Son and through the Father and the Son the Holy Spirit is upon us.

Before he left them Jesus speaks to us of his relationship with the Father, but now he is telling the Apostles about the Spirit of Truth who will come as his witness.

As Jesus leaves the earth, he promises that the 'Helper' will come to communicate God's will for his people on earth.

And what do we have to do to receive that? Well – exactly what the disciples did – watch, wait and pray! – Simply ask – Jesus has always promised that what we ask for in his name will be so – but then the gift is in the listening and discerning – being attentive despite the clamourings of the world that can drown out the voice of God in our lives. It is not always easy to know the difference between God's will and our own – that's why it is good to put our prayers and inspired thoughts in common with others – to gather as church – wherever we are – church building – a field or a forest – or a community of communities on a Facebook group ☺ , to worship and honour God together so that we can build up the spirit in the place – in our hearts – in our minds and outpouring into our actions so that God's will can be more strongly known and his Spirit of love and truth more strongly lived out.

Very often, we concentrate on the actual event of Pentecost – let's face it, Luke tells a good story in the Acts reading – full of excitement, humour, drama, awe, wonder, mystery – violent winds – tongues of fire, suspected drunkenness and prophesy.

But there's more. There are the promises of Pentecost. First declared by Joel the OT prophet that God will pour out his Spirit upon all flesh – all people – and daughters shall prophesy, and young men shall see visions, and old men shall dream dreams..'

The second promise comes as Jesus tells the disciples that what he hasn't been able to teach, the Holy Spirit – the Spirit of truth - would continue. The Spirit will make the teachings of Jesus relevant to each new generation and to each new age.

Isn't it wonderful – God knows no boundaries. When we are prompted by the Holy Spirit to explore faith in a deeper way – and when we respond - we are shown special and new ways to meet and come to know Jesus, the living God

This morning we too are gathered for this Christian festival of Pentecost, but what is special for us today is that we can actually witness as to *how* the gift of the Holy Spirit is being revealed –

We are gathering in a way we never thought possible – well at least I never did – livestreaming a service – the very words were double dutch to me! But God has equipped us with the grace and courage and open mindedness to venture out and do our church in a new way and how exciting to be witnessing such breadth of expression – such breadth of community – making friendships with people that geographically would be impossible usually – but spiritually we unite in the one heart of the one body of the Spirit of truth and love – in the one body of Christ. We are the 3000 first followers – enacted out this day as we all understand the same language of community, fellowship, friendship – and also bewilderment, confusion, uncertainty. In a world turned upside down we become strength for one another, comfort and hope for one another.

Just as the spirit turned the world upside down then – perhaps he is turning it upside down for us now as the Holy Spirit shows us a new and deeper and loving way to be human.

In community that plays out as volunteering for the vulnerable – foodbanks – sharing books and plants on the walkways of our communities – honouring the SD rules for the sake of others – looking out for our neighbours –

And in the church a new and deeper and loving way to be human plays out as we come to believe that Jesus is the way, the truth and the life – as we decide to give our faith our best shot and commit to follow him – find a community – find a church that we can belong to in spirit and body - and commit to, and do the journey with, that church family, offering ourselves - through Baptism and Confirmation – and symbolically receiving the bread of life and the cup of salvation through Communion

It is through being part of community that we can respond to God as he reaches out to each and every one of us through Jesus in the power of his Spirit and says to us – ‘I love you’ – What other response could there possibly be except to receive and say ‘thank you...’ and to receive the good will of neighbours and go and do likewise - to receive the gospel good will of the hospitality, welcome and love of Jesus Christ through church life and people – and go and do likewise as we are sent out ‘in the power of the spirit to live and work to the praise and glory of God...

‘Thy Kingdom Come’ we plead - bring heavenly love down to earth.... Our faith is earthy and the symbols of Pentecost are earthy – the tongues of flames – the rushing wind and breath of the spirit – the water of life – and as Malcolm Guite expresses in his beautiful Sonnet for Pentecost – you and I represent the earth by becoming beings through the earth and by becoming humanly fully alive as God’s spirit of life breathes upon us.

How alive do you feel today?

So on this day of Pentecost - the birth of the Church - I invite us all to renew our sense of child-like wonder for the joy of belonging to a community of communities – in our neighbourhoods through mutual sharing and caring - and in our church through baptism and the mystery of Holy Communion, and to renew our gratitude for all that God has done for us through Jesus Christ - and continues to do through the healing and transforming power of a Holy Spirit that is available for everyone who truly reaches out to receive it....

Happy Birthday Church of God – people of God – and I want to end by reading you Malcolm’s sonnet – prophetic words of hope that speak so much into the situation we are in today...:

Today we feel the wind beneath our wings
Today the hidden fountain flows and plays
Today the church draws breath at last and sings
As every flame becomes a Tongue of praise.
This is the feast of fire, air, and water
Poured out and breathed and kindled into earth.
The earth herself awakens to her maker
And is translated out of death to birth.
The right words come today in their right order
And every word spells freedom and release
Today the gospel crosses every border
All tongues are loosened by the Prince of Peace
Today the lost are found in His translation.
Whose mother-tongue is Love, in every nation. Amen