

At the beginning of Luke's first book (the Gospel of Luke) Jesus is filled with the Holy Spirit and sets out the manifesto of his ministry by quoting from Isaiah:

"The Spirit of the Lord is on me,
because he has anointed me
to preach good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners
and recovery of sight for the blind,
to release the oppressed,
¹⁹ to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour."

Now at the beginning his second book (The Book of Acts) the disciples are all filled with the Spirit and Peter sets out the manifesto for the church by quoting from the book of Joel:

'In the last days, God says,
I will pour out my Spirit on all people.
Your sons and daughters will prophesy,
your young men will see visions,
your old men will dream dreams.
¹⁸ Even on my servants, both men and women,
I will pour out my Spirit in those days,
and they will prophesy.
¹⁹ I will show wonders in the heaven above
and signs on the earth below,
blood and fire and billows of smoke.
²⁰ The sun will be turned to darkness
and the moon to blood
before the coming of the great and glorious day of the Lord.
²¹ And everyone who calls
on the name of the Lord will be saved.

In the new community of the church which came to birth at Pentecost the joy and responsibility of speaking the words of God to the world is no longer limited to special individuals: male and female, young and old, bosses and workers, will proclaim the words and works of God. The end result of this will be that all (regardless of nationality) who call on the Lord will be saved.

Before his resurrection, Jesus had told his disciples: "you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." When they were gathered together on that first Pentecost, this mission began as first they were **Propelled by the Spirit** and later, **propelled by persecution**.

Propelled by the Spirit

On the morning of Pentecost the disciples were gathered together. I usually imagine they were engrossed in passionate prayer but we don't know - it was early morning, they may just have been breakfasting together - but we do know that the Holy Spirit came upon them in ways that brought to mind lots of Old Testament symbolism including the Spirit of God hovering on the waters in creation, the wind of God parting the Red Sea, the breath of God reviving the dried bones in Ezekiel, the purifying fire of Isaiah and separation into different languages at the Tower of Babel. The impact on the disciples was explosive, their praise couldn't be contained in the building and they were suddenly outside praising God in languages they didn't know but which all the foreign visitors there understood. In that dramatic moment of the new epoch of God's redeemed Kingdom, not only was hope reborn - but God's salvation reached across all barriers. For a

short period of time the power of God was so great that the Church kept attracting those who were genuinely seeking God and the Church grew in numbers, in in fellowship.

Unsurprisingly, the religious elite didn't like God at work outside their control and outside their structures. They quickly started to move to quell this new movement. Not long after Pentecost the persecution of the Christians began and the followers of Jesus were **propelled by persecution** to flee from Jerusalem in all directions

To anyone planning church growth this would have seemed like a disaster as God ripped the heart out of the Jerusalem Church and all these new Christians were scattered before they could be properly disciplined or commissioned. But, as they went, they gossiped the gospel, and new churches sprang up. They had become the first fulfilment of Jesus' promise to preach the Gospel in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.

Today we are in lockdown -we can't meet together, and we can't travel, so how does this apply to us? Here are a couple of thoughts which are not original to me – but which I found helpful and hopeful.

Firstly: God's timing and technology. In the first century the new technology was "roads." The Romans were great at communication and built roads all over the empire. Had Pentecost happened a few decades earlier there would have been few visitors to Jerusalem and little opportunity to take the church outwards. The roads enabled the scattering of the believers and the growth of the church in a way that was only just possible. In our lockdown, the church has moved out of the buildings and onto the internet. As we have done so, we have reached out to people who either didn't come to church ever or who struggle to get there. If the virus had happened 10 years ago our ability to connect with each other and new friends would have been limited. We have been propelled by the virus onto the internet and it is important that we embrace this as a new thing God is doing at the right time so that, when we eventually return to our buildings, the new networks and communications that he has given us must be incorporated into our Church life.

Secondly the picture of cinema going is a helpful guide for the future of the church. Not so long ago a cinema had one big screen, showing one film at a set time. With the advent of multiscreen people were able to make choices amongst different films at the same place. Now we have Netflix and the like, and people can stay at home and watch what they like when they like - sometimes watching single episodes and sometimes watching whole box sets at once. At Holy Trinity we had started to move slowly from the big screen model to the multiplex – offering different styles of worship at different times and different days: Our 9.30 on Sunday morning was different from our Wednesday Morning communion which, in turn, was different from Trinity Praise – but what they all have in common is that you need to be there at the right time or miss it. As a result of lockdown we have moved further towards the Netflix model – This sermon will be read or watched by different people at different times. (and some of you may go onto the church website or YouTube to catch up on previous ones) Some of you would make it a commitment to be in church every week, some of you would like to be in church more often, but circumstances prevent you from doing so and some of you listening to this sermon wouldn't want to come to a church building at all. Whilst some of us are missing the opportunity to worship on Sundays again – others will be having an opportunity to worship as part of our church family who wouldn't have had this opportunity prior to Lockdown. When we do return to the building our new normal must incorporate the new things that God has given us in this time.

On this Pentecost Sunday (or whenever you are listening to this sermon) we pray for a fresh outpouring of the Holy Spirit on us and all his church. As we do so we look to him to propel us to take the Gospel to through us to our Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and to the ends of the earth.