

Pentecost

Sunday 31st May 2020



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Readings:

1 Corinthians 12:3b-13

Therefore, I want you to understand that no one speaking by the Spirit of God ever says ‘Let Jesus be cursed!’ and no one can say ‘Jesus is Lord’ except by the Holy Spirit.

Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the discernment of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. All these are activated by one and the same Spirit, who allots to each one individually just as the Spirit chooses. For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.

John 7:37-39

On the last day of the festival, the great day, while Jesus was standing there, he cried out, ‘Let anyone who is thirsty come to me, and let the one who believes in me drink. As the scripture has said, “Out of the believer’s heart shall flow rivers of living water.” ’ Now he said this about the Spirit, which believers in him were to receive; for as yet there was no Spirit, because Jesus was not yet glorified.

Reflection

So, we have reached Pentecost, the event we call the Church's birthday. I am not sure about the accuracy of that definition though it is certainly one we can all relate to – the beginning of a new life. But if this was a birthday, it followed the longest gestation period ever, beginning with God's covenant with Abraham in about 2,000 BC. And God had certainly not been idle in the intervening period – he had been preparing the nursery, creating the conditions that would ensure the survival of the new infant and allow it to thrive.

There was an antenatal team making sure that the birth would be a healthy one, prophets and angels, messengers from God passing on instructions to ensure that everything was ready when the time came.

The cradle was to be the ancient homeland that God had given to the Jews as part of that covenant, Israel, and particularly Jerusalem. But as a child outgrows the cot, it takes its first tentative steps in its immediate environment, then goes to school, college, perhaps, before taking its full and mature place in the adult world. Just as the church first began to spread in the countries around, Syria, Asia Minor and Egypt – and then as it came of age moved further afield to Europe and the wider world, widening its social circle and embracing many new friends on the way.

And as we anticipate the message of next Sunday and Trinity, we also reflect on the part each member played in the infant's upbringing.

The child would of course need healthy nourishment and what more healthy food than the bread of life which Christ himself came to provide. And it is not food for childhood only, but a lifelong staple as we have symbolised – and will again symbolise – by receiving the sacrament each week. It is food which fuels our growth but also maintains our life and health from childhood onwards. Christ was and is the food on which the Church.

The child will need good instruction and encouragement if it is to grow in wisdom and develop character and moral strength, and for that we have been given God's Spirit. As Jesus had promised: "When he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth." (John 16:13) There is no better teacher than the Holy Spirit. And as he encourages, so he enables. Those baby muscles need to be strengthened and developed to prepare the body to face the challenges ahead; at Pentecost, the Spirit brought with him, and passed on to the baby church, the power to flex those muscles and toughen them up so that when the church faced persecution, it was ready to meet anything the authorities threw at it.

And finally, and crucially, every child needs a parent's love. Whatever else we learn from the Bible, the ongoing message is that God loves us – and loves us as a father; the father that Jesus taught us to call "Abba," Daddy. No child will thrive without a secure and loving environment and that is what the love of God gave the early Church. Those young Christians knew that whatever happened, he would never desert them but surround them with loving care; and he had given them his only son to show just how great his love was. It is his love that continues to surround us today, whatever situation we find ourselves in. Our own development and maturity is assured if we remain within his love.

I apologise if you have found this extended metaphor a little fanciful; I do sometimes let my imagination run away with me as those of you who have been with me over recent years will know. But the essence of this reflection is that the Church and everyone in it are children of God, and his creations. And just like human parents, God awaited the new birth of the Church with excited anticipation, rejoiced at its delivery, and has ever since devoted himself to its welfare. And "nothing in all creation will ever be able to separate us from the love of God that is revealed in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Romans 8:39) Amen

Prayers

Today's Collect

God, who as at this time
taught the hearts of your faithful people
by sending to them the light of your Holy Spirit:
grant us by the same Spirit
to have a right judgement in all things
and evermore to rejoice in his holy comfort;
through the merits of Christ Jesus our Saviour,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.
Amen

A Prayer for Pentecost

Faithful God,
who fulfilled the promises of Easter
by sending us your Holy Spirit
and opening to every race and nation
the way of life eternal:
open our lips by your Spirit,
that every tongue may tell of your glory;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen

A Prayer for the Christian Community – the Church – at this time

We are not people of fear:
we are people of courage.
We are not people who protect our own safety:
we are people who protect our neighbours' safety.
We are not people of greed:
we are people of generosity.
We are your people God,
giving and loving,
wherever we are,
whatever it costs
For as long as it takes
wherever you call us. Amen

Barbara Glasson President of the Methodist Conference

Blessing

May Christ's holy, healing, enabling Spirit be with you
And guide you on your way at every change and turn.
And the blessing of God almighty,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
be among you and remain with you always.
Amen