



A sermon for Pentecost

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31 May 2020

- [Numbers 11:24-30](#)
- [Acts 2:1-21](#)
- [John 20:19-23](#)

As a little girl growing up in Montego Bay Jamaica steeped in the life of the church, I would often hear the older folks refer to ‘Whitson’ shortened for Whitsunday (alternately Pentecost). What I didn’t know then was that Pentecost was already an important Jewish festival (sometimes known as the Feast of Weeks) which fell 7 weeks after Passover - beginning on the 2nd day of Passover, the ancient Israelites would count 49 days and celebrated a festival on the 50th day. This seven-week period, was a time when a hot dry wind might blow in and blight the young crops, so the end of this period of time was an occasion for celebration. On the 50th day, the ancient Israelites would once again journey to Jerusalem to offer the first fruits (the Feast of Weeks or the Festival of Shavu’ot).

Once the temple had been destroyed, the tradition of taking the 1st fruits to Jerusalem ended; Imagine the kind of devastation in that community, financially and socially that followed. But then somehow, they re-envisioned life; – the groundwork was done; it had been agreed, this became established as the place where Moses received the torah, the 10 commandments. So the place where they once celebrated an exclusively agricultural festival took on a new meaning. You could say that they had indeed re-imagined ministry. They found a new way and a new purpose for the festival of Shavu’ot. They had a new reason to celebrate the goodness of God in that place. And that is why there was such a great crowd gathered in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost. They were gathered in thanksgiving, to celebrate the commandments being given to them.

The Coronavirus pandemic has become for us that thing that’s entered and shattered our community, and will leave much devastation in its wake. The





question is whether we throw our hands up in despair or whether we begin together to re-envision a new kind of way to be the people of God. In the midst of the devastation, it is imperative that we recognise the Spirit of God in our midst. God's spirit has to be both the driving force and the direction of any move we make going forward, God's Spirit must be the focus of whatever new birth comes into being.

Many years before the establishment of our Christian celebration of Pentecost, the disciples' ancestors witnessed the drama surrounding the giving of the 10 commandments (thunder and lightning, thick clouds, loud trumpet blast, Mt Sinai covered in smoke because the Lord descended on it in fire). On this Pentecost day, recorded in the Acts of the Apostles, another drama was about to be unfolded.

For the arrival of the Holy Spirit, we have what is described as rushing or violent wind, we have tongues of fire resting on the heads of the disciples – all of them we are told were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in tongues – as enabled by the spirit. Not some senseless babble because we know that the gathered international audience were able to understand them.

These were the same disciples who were gathered behind locked doors afraid that something may happen to them. And oh yes it did! Something did happen to them! Jesus came to them at the point when they were at their lowest :- scared, afraid, frightened, insecure and he gives them as it were the first course; he gives them peace, "Peace be with you". "I was sent by the Father, now I am sending you". The risen and ascended Christ has not just left us with fond memories to keep to ourselves of 'the good old days' – a story just to share with others who are minded. The story of the good news released by the Spirit is to be shared with a wider audience – not just 'people like us'.

At Pentecost, the resurrected Christ who promised to return did just that. The scared disciples were now emboldened to step out and proclaim the message of the Good News. As they were mocked and thought to be drunk, Peter rises to the occasion and reminded the gathered audience that there was nothing strange





about what was happening – this was a fulfilment of the prophets – and he quotes from the prophet Joel.

“In the last days God’s Spirit will be poured out on all people – your sons and daughters will prophesy, young men will see visions and your old men will dream dreams”. In other words, there will be something in it for everyone. This is for no religious class set apart, the coming of the spirit is for all God’s people. Aren’t these people Galileans? How come we can understand what they’re saying to us? In verse 12 we read, “Amazed and perplexed, they asked one another, “What does this mean?””

And that is the question for us today. What does it mean for me to be a child of God? What does it mean for you to be a child of God? What does it mean for us here in Dover, Romney Marsh, Sittingbourne, Seasalter, Benenden, Maidstone, Thanet, Margate, Ramsgate, Canterbury? What does the coming of the Holy Spirit Mean?

Perhaps we can take a look at another of our designated readings for today – Numbers Chapter 11. Moses was ministering under really difficult circumstances – they were journeying through the wilderness but there was no thanksgiving. No thanksgiving that the Lord had brought them out of bondage away from the cruelty of the pharaoh – instead all they could do was complain. They found faults with Moses’ leadership, left right and centre. They blamed Moses for them missing the good old days – the days when instead of the tasteless manna, they had meat, fruits and vegetables. They moaned at Moses till life became unbearable. Moses in turn cried out to the Lord under the weight of the burden he bore.

God replied to Moses. ‘Gather me seventy of the elders known to you as leaders and I will put my spirit on them and they will help you carry the burden so you do not have to do it alone. They were to share not only the responsibility but also his authority as they helped him bear the load. This was God’s answer. The gift of the spirit given to us is not for our personal gain – to boast about how wonderful and gifted we are. When God calls us and gives us his spirit, it is given for the benefit of





the whole body of Christ. It is not just for ‘my church’ – it is for the whole body. We share in the responsibility of the tasks given to us in God’s authority. To prophecy means being able to understand and mediate what God is saying to all his people. We are there to support and carry one another. In the same chapter, we learn that there were two others who could be regarded as elders but who had not participated in the gathering with the rest of the 70, but had stayed behind in the camp, and now they were prophesying too. Young Joshua, ran up to Moses to put in a complaint, “They are not one of us, they weren’t here - stop them!” Moses was very wise in his reply, “I wish that all God’s children were prophets and that the Lord would put his spirit on them.”

How dare we try to put limits on what the Lord can do, and is doing? The gospel of Mark tells a similar story of the disciples asking Jesus to forbid others who were driving out demons, as “they are not one of us.” It is God who initiates the calling; God who entrusts his people with his Spirit. The Spirit’s presence causes some alarm, it is controversial because it is not some neat thing that can be fitted into our way of being, and neither is the Spirit just the remit of ‘the authorised minister or the familiar structures’. There is nothing tidy about the Holy Spirit. We cannot domesticate the spirit; lock the Spirit away in our monuments that we call church and only communicate on our terms, once per week or when we feel like it.

Today the Pentecost we celebrate is one that saw the Disciples’ ministries reinvigorated and re-imagined. Pentecost became the real birth of the Church! So today we’re celebrating the church’s birthday. We are giving thanks for the coming of the spirit in our midst. But what does it all mean? I hope that like the disciples, we will allow the Holy Spirit to move amongst us like fire – purifying us to become the new gold; our changed lives, changing the lives of others around us. My sisters and brothers let us welcome the Holy Spirit into our lives that we might catch a glimpse of the new things that God wants to do, the new things that God is already doing in our midst. Let us use the opportunity of lockdown to dwell in the word of God; let us respond to God’s generosity with our own generosity - and let us hear the words of Jesus, “As the Father sent me, so I send you to go and share the Good News.”





My sisters and brothers, today, on this Pentecost Sunday, “Receive the Holy Spirit” and let’s be ready to live afresh what it means to be the people of God in the places where we are called to be. Receive the Holy Spirit! Amen

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