

Stay in Jerusalem. Await the Holy Spirit. Save Lives.

Acts 2: 1-21

Haven't we been blessed with such a lovely week of weather! Great as we continue through lockdown, so we can, at least, enjoy time outdoors. We've had almost wall-to-wall sunshine for days and days, courtesy of the high pressure that has been over the country for the last couple of weeks. But often, hot sunny weather comes to an end with a bang. Pressure builds and builds as the days get hotter and hotter; it gets muggier and muggier, and then the atmosphere seems to explode with lightning flashes and cracks of thunder.

I've always loved thunderstorms. As a little girl, I'd sit on the window ledge of my bedroom whilst my sister was hiding under the bed covers, and I'd watch the lightning flash across the sky and then count – 'one thousand and one, one thousand and two, one thousand and three' until the thunder came, at first a rumble in the distance until the storm was overhead. And then the thunder was mighty loud, not a rumble but a *crack*, and the rain would be at its heaviest, splashing the ground below. And then the storm would end as it began, as it moved over the area, fewer and fewer displays of lightning, the cracks of thunder returning to far off rumbles and the intensity of the rain gradually reducing to just a few spots.

Peace returns, but there is something about the air during and after a thunderstorm that energises and invigorates the soul. It invites you to draw deep breaths of it into your lungs and relish the feeling that the air is alive with the power of nature. There's a beautiful freshness that wasn't there before.

Today is Pentecost Sunday when we remember that first Pentecost over two thousand years ago, when the Spirit of Truth – the Holy Spirit – came upon the disciples in the most amazing of ways. We know from today's reading from the book of Acts that the disciples were gathered together in one place when a sound, like a wild wind, came from heaven and blew through that place. Then tongues of fire rested on each of their heads. And with that, they were filled with God's Spirit and started talking in languages they did not know. All through the Spirit's power.

Because of the Feast of Pentecost, Jews from all over the world were gathered in Jerusalem. When they heard the followers of Jesus speaking in each of their native tongues. They were confused. They said to each other:

'Aren't these people just Galilean?'

'How is it that they know each of our languages?'

'We're Parthians, Medes and Elamites.'

'We come from Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia.'

'From Pontus and Asia.'

'From Phrygia and Pamphylia.'

'From Egypt and that Cyrenian bit of Libya.'

'From Rome, both Jews and converts to Judaism.'

'Cretans and Arabs, too.'

'Yet we hear them speak about God's great deeds in our own languages.'

So together they cried: 'What does this mean?'

There were some, however, who sneered and said, 'Nah, they're just drunk.' And you wonder how being drunk can cause you suddenly to speak someone else's language. Not a usual experience of excess alcohol.

So, Peter stood up and answered the crowd's question.

'We're not drunk,' he said. 'It's only nine in the morning. No, this is what the prophet Joel said would happen'.

'In the last days,' says God, 'I will pour out my Spirit on everyone. Your sons and daughters will prophesy. Your young men will see visions and your old men will dream dreams. Even on slaves, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit, and they too will prophesy. There will be warning signs in the sky and signs on the earth, as well. Blood and fire and smoke. The sun will turn black, the moon red as blood, before God's Big Day arrives. Then everyone who calls on God's name will be saved.'

In our Gospel reading two weeks ago, Jesus tells his disciples in John 16 that he is going away, returning to God the Father. He says that it is for their good that he is going because, unless he goes away, the Counsellor will not come to them. And more, when this Counsellor comes - which in several verses later he calls the 'Spirit of Truth' - this Spirit of Truth will guide them into *all* truth, not speaking on his own, but speaking only what he hears from God the Father and Jesus the Son.

There's been a lot said and written about 'truth' this last week. But the truth that the Spirit brings is truth on which we can depend, because we know that it

comes directly from God the Father and Jesus himself. No need for soundbites or advisors telling us how to interpret this truth. We can read it for ourselves in God's word, the very Scripture on which Peter depends in that first sermon to the people of Jerusalem gathered that first day of Pentecost.

It's a truth on which the disciples can *trust*. At the end of Luke's gospel, Jesus told them that he would send to them what his Father had promised – the Holy Spirit, and that they were to stay in the city – to stay put and *wait*. If Jesus had felt a slogan was necessary, it probably would have been this:

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And stay they did, because they could trust Jesus, despite the risk to their own safety in a city that had just crucified their leader. They followed the guidance they had been given and ten days later the Spirit came, just as he said it would.

Not only was it a truth on which the disciples could trust, it was a truth that brought *confidence* – the confidence to do what they couldn't do in their own strength – to tell others about Jesus and to invite them to call on God's name and be saved. In Luke 12, Jesus tells the disciples that they are not to worry about how they will defend themselves or what they will say, for '*the Holy Spirit will teach you at that time what you should say.*' And we learn at the end of Acts chapter 2 that those who accepted Peter's message that day, a message fuelled by the Holy Spirit, were baptised, and were saved. Three thousand of them who had called on God's name.

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Because the disciples trusted in Jesus, awaited the Holy Spirit and witnessed to the truth of his name, we today have the same opportunity to put our trust in Jesus, to call on his name and be saved. The Holy Spirit is for everyone. In verse 39 of chapter 2, Peter says: '*The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off – for all whom the Lord our God will call.*'

In what way is the Lord your God calling you today?

He may well have called you years ago and you've followed him ever since. But is he calling you afresh, to a new purpose maybe?

On this Pentecost Sunday I pray that the Holy Spirit - the Spirit of Truth - would come like a whirlwind into each of our lives, leaving a beautiful freshness that wasn't there before, and bringing renewed trust and confidence in his name.

I wonder if this will be your prayer too.