

Holy Trinity Sunningdale
Sunday, May 19, 2024 – Pentecost
Readings – Acts 2:1-21 & John 15:26-27

Today we commemorate the divine event of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit descended upon the apostles, empowering them to spread the message of Jesus Christ. Many of us sitting here will find the experience of the disciples described in our reading from Acts very strange to comprehend. As we are sitting here, if suddenly there comes a violent wind and what seemed like tongues of fire resting on Revd. Terry and Revd. Jon and they ran outside speaking in strange languages, we will all reach for our phones and call emergency services!

In John 15:26-27, Jesus promises his disciples to send the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, a comforting presence, but, also an empowering force, to equip his disciples for the task of witness. We remember that Jesus was crucified at Passover time, and he ascended 40 days after the resurrection. The Holy Spirit came 10 days after the ascension.

Why did the Spirit come as tongues of fire? Tongues symbolise speech therefore important for the communication of the gospel. Fire symbolises God's purifying presence which burns away the undesirable elements of our lives and sets our hearts aflame to ignite the lives of others. On Mount Sinai, God confirmed the validity of the Old Testament with fire from heaven (Exodus 19:16-18). At Pentecost, God confirmed the validity of the Holy Spirit's ministry by sending fire. At Pentecost, God chose to make his presence known in a spectacular way by violent wind and fire but we must keep in mind that God also speaks in gentle whispers.

The disciples literally spoke in other languages. This is a miraculous attention-getter for the international crowd in town for the festival. All the nationalities represented recognised their own language being spoken. This miracle drew people's attention to the presence and power of the Holy Spirit. It is significant in helping us see that Christianity is not limited to any race or group of people. Christ offers salvation to all people without regard to nationality or race. It also demonstrates that God works all kinds of miracles to spread the gospel.

I have been challenged by people who ask me why I choose to believe in the white man's God. Two key questions are put to me. "If there is truly any power in the name of Jesus, would slave masters or colonial masters give something powerful to their slaves or the people they want to dominate?". The implication here is that the gun is powerful therefore no slave master or colonial master will give a gun to his slaves or colonial subjects. The only reason the white man gave black people - their slaves or colonial subjects Christianity is because they know it has no power to save.

The second question is, "Why would white people who can hardly bear for a black person to seat at the same table, or live on the same street or community as they do in this world that is temporary and passing away, desire to live in heaven eternally, side by side with black people?"

My answer to both questions is the story of what happened at Pentecost. Whether the disciples like it or not, they were propelled by the Holy Spirit out of the house into

the street to proclaim the gospel of salvation to all nationalities. It wasn't up to the disciples or the slave masters or colonial masters. This is the work of the Holy Spirit! I repeat, God will work all kinds of miracles to spread the gospel!

The primary role of the Spirit is to testify about Jesus. The apostles and the men and women who came after them continued to minister and proclaim the gospel in the power of the Holy Spirit. We are empowered to bear witness to the truth of who Jesus is and what he has done. The Spirit enables us to articulate our faith, to share our personal encounters with Christ, and to proclaim the good news of salvation to those around us. The Spirit not only empowers our words but also bears witness through our lives.

The crowd which gathered in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost quickly recognised that something supernatural was taking place and they wanted an explanation. Peter stepped forward and explained the truth about God. Peter's confidence and boldness came from the Holy Spirit who transformed him into a powerful and dynamic speaker. Peter tells the people that they should listen to the testimony that Jesus is the Messiah and the risen Christ could change their lives.

Today, as we commemorate the day of Pentecost, we are reminded of the same gospel – what the resurrection of Jesus means.

1. It means that Jesus is the Son of God and his word can be trusted.
2. It means his sacrifice for sin is acceptable to God, so we can be completely forgiven.
3. It means that our Saviour is alive and active, able to help us in times of need.
4. It also means that one day we, too, will conquer death and live with God for eternity – black and white and brown and yellow, altogether in unity!

The Christian faith rests on the basic fact of the empty tomb – and that is the reason for Pentecost, the message of Pentecost – the good news of our Lord Jesus Christ!

Do you believe it? Almighty God, we believe, help our unbelief! Amen.

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