

A contemplative Pentecost

During May those of us sharing morning prayer have been considering Contemplative Awareness.

Contemplative awareness is to grow in the experience of every moment being a sacred moment. To be more aware of the presence of God who is always with us.

Encouraged by poets and prophets and mystics and ordinary people we allowed our desire for a closer more permanent experience of God to find expression. Here are two examples that have inspired our thinking.

The first is the author C.S.Lewis.

We may ignore, but we can nowhere evade, the presence of God. The World is crowded with Him. He walks everywhere incognito, and the incognito is not always hard to penetrate. The real labour is to remember, to attend. In fact, to come awake. Still more to remain awake.

We shared together that our attention span to the presence of God is very short and we are easily distracted, even though the world is crowded with God.

You are not going to leave without me quoting Brother Lawrence.

There is not in the world a way of life more sweet, nor more delightful than continual converse with God... If I were a preacher, I should preach nothing else but the practice of the presence of God.

Having explored this pathway through May we now approach Pentecost and I began to wonder about the role of the Holy Spirit

in assisting us in the desire to know God more and be more fully appreciative of His presence.

At first I was struck by the contrast between the experience of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost and the invitation to know God in silence and stillness; without words and without thoughts. Just being in God and with God.

I guess we are all familiar with the Pentecost event. Jesus has promised that the Advocate, the Comforter, the Spirit of Truth is to come. The disciples are praying together and there is a loud noise like rushing wind and something like flames and an experience of ecstatic euphoria. Overwhelmed with joy the disciples praise God in known languages, the languages of the people there in Jerusalem.

As an aside, this wasn't speaking in heavenly tongues that require interpretation – St. Paul speaks about that elsewhere – that too is a move and work of the Holy Spirit.

This outburst of praise and joy and adoration encompasses the whole world, all the nationalities present in Jerusalem.

Because you and I have learned about the presence of the Holy Spirit from Pentecost and maybe like me you have been to conferences and events like New Wine and Spring Harvest where ecstatic praise and worship have seemed very Pentecost like, it's supremely heartening to realise (*what I should have always realised*) that the Holy Spirit is as much at work without noise and drama.

Contemplative awareness is an invitation to look inward, to find stillness and quiet, to engage with God in a new way and at a deep level.

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But that doesn't mean the experience lacks anything. Here again is Brother Lawrence describing his way.

*I make it my business to persevere in His holy presence. A habitual, silent and secret conversation of the soul with God, which often **causes me joys and raptures inwardly** and sometimes outwardly – and they so great, that I am forced to use means to moderate them and prevent their appearance to others!*

I guess it wasn't the done thing to wander around the monastery lost in wonder, love and praise!!

What I find so attractive and encouraging is that each of us can experience the influence and presence of the Holy Spirit taking us deeper in our experience of God. If you are drawn to the contemplative, the silence and stillness it's just as rich and powerful and joyful as those who find it more natural to be loud and exuberant and more Pentecost like.

In the Psalms we read both of ways.

Be still and know that I am God Psalm 46

Shout for joy to God, all the earth!
Sing the glory of his name;
make his praise glorious. Psalm 66

Being filled with God's Spirit might have been for you something like the Pentecost experience. I've known that and known it in others. But it's not an end in itself. The Spirit leads us into Truth, reveals the Father, comes as comforter, assists us in prayer. The Holy Spirit is always and everywhere guiding us **to know** the Father and the Son and to **make known** the Father and the Son.

How then is the Holy Spirit at work assisting us to go deeper when all is stillness and silence?

Psalm 42 – As the deer pants for the water so my soul longs after you.

I think the Holy Spirit is prompting, prompting, prompting. He calls and calls and calls again. He nudges and guides and grants us the courage to leave aside the distractions. He encourages us deeper. Principally the Holy Spirit fosters the desire for God and reminds us to turn inward and worship.

Some of us have alarms on our phones to stop for a moment and pray. When distracted by whatever is going on it recalls us to prayer.

I believe the Holy Spirit is constantly at work seeking to prompt us to prayer, the moment of inner worship and connection. It's less dramatic, its more individual, but it is fully and completely an experience of the presence of God. The God who is everywhere, within and without.

The Queens favourite hymn is based on the story of Jacob.

The wanderer / the sun gone down / my rest a stone / in my dreams / A way appears / steps unto heaven / angels to beckon me / Waking thought bright with thy praise / raise the stone. / Bethel. (It means House of God)

"Nearer my God to thee" and for Jacob it was a complete surprise.

On his journey, unexpectedly, he encounters God for himself. In the dream God speaks to him reiterating the promises made to Abraham.

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Other than God's faithfulness to his own promise, Jacob has done nothing to deserve God's favour or to be blessed.

When He wakes, Jacob thinks "Surely the Lord is in this place and I was not aware of it". Nearer my God to Thee.

I wonder if we might allow ourselves, this Pentecost, to realise that our personal experience is legitimate and real. That the joy and rapture, the comfort and truth of the Holy Spirit is as much ours as anyone else.

If we don't quite see ourselves experiencing Pentecost the way the disciples did, or even if that kind of exuberance and extrovert behaviour is uncomfortable and alien to us, there is another way.

My desire, for myself and each of you, whether here or at home watching live or watching a little later, is that we encounter God more deeply and more fully. That the Holy Spirit fosters a thirst in the soul and then guides us to the stream of living water.

Let us pray.

Revd. Jon Hutchinson, 5/6/22