

PENTECOST 23-05-2021 *The Reverend Lorna Green* Acts 2.1-21; Psalm 104.26-36; Romans 8.22-27; John 15.26-27, 16.4b-15

Acts 2.1-21

When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability. Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each. Amazed and astonished, they asked, 'Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language? Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabs—in our own languages we hear them speaking about God's deeds of power.' All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, 'What does this mean?' But others sneered and said, 'They are filled with new wine.'

But Peter, standing with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed them: 'Men of Judea and all who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and listen to what I say. Indeed, these are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only nine o'clock in the morning. No, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel:

"In the last days it will be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams. Even upon my slaves, both men and women, in those days I will pour out my Spirit; and they shall prophesy. And I will show portents in the heaven above and signs on the earth below, blood, and fire, and smoky mist. The sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood, before the coming of the Lord's great and glorious day. Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved."

Romans 8.22-27

We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labour pains until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies. For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience. Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words. And God, who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.

Our first reading today, from the Acts of the Apostles- the one with all the complicated place names in it- tells us about all the excitement and amazement experienced by the disciples as the Holy Spirit came upon them. There they were, still wondering what to do next now that Jesus had left them, and all of a sudden there was wind and fire and strange languages- it must have been mind-blowing for everyone involved.

The second reading, from the letter to the Romans, was written by the Apostle Paul some years after this event.

And then our reading from John's Gospel takes us back to just before Jesus was arrested and put to death. He was talking to the twelve at their last meal together; and he promised to send them the Advocate, the Spirit of Truth- also called the Comforter, the Friend, and the third person of the Trinity.

Jesus told his friends that it would be better for them if he went away, because then the Holy Spirit would come. Jesus the human being could only be in one place at a time, but the Spirit would be for everyone, in every believer's heart and mind, helping us to understand the truth about God.

So to put all of this in some sort of chronological order: first, before he died, Jesus promised to send the Holy Spirit to his followers after he had gone. That's what we heard from John's Gospel.

Then after Jesus had died and risen again, he spent some forty days with the disciples before returning to be with God. Ascension Day was commemorated on Thursday 13th.

Ten days later was the Jewish festival called the Feast of Weeks, which has the Greek name 'Pentecost'. Jerusalem would have been full of people who had come from all different places to celebrate the festival. The events of the day of Pentecost are told in the book of the Acts of the Apostles.

Pentecost is considered to be the birthday of the Christian Church. After this day, the fearful disciples suddenly had the courage to go out and preach the gospel and the church began to grow.

When St Paul wrote his letter to the church in Rome, he had been travelling around telling people about Jesus for a few years. He went to towns and villages, got groups of believers together and established churches, some of which he later wrote to after he had moved on.

In the section of this magnificent letter that we heard today, Paul writes about the Spirit. He acknowledges that we can be impatient as we wait for God's kingdom to come so that the world can be as it was intended to be. He says the whole creation is groaning like a woman in labour, waiting and yearning for new life.

At the time he was writing, Paul's world was a hard place. Military occupation, violence, poverty, disease, and death were everywhere.

Paul, in common with other Christians at the time, hoped and believed that it would all end soon. Jesus would return to rule the world and everything would be freed from death and evil.

Two thousand years later, we are still here, still waiting, and sometimes the world seems to be getting worse by the day. We struggle to understand why there is so much pain and destruction in the world; we despair at the horrors we see on the news and read about in the newspapers.

Paul gives us great comfort as he describes the work of the Holy Spirit. When we don't know how to pray, he tells us, then the Spirit helps us in our weakness and intercedes for us with sighs too deep for words.

When we feel overwhelmed by sadness or grief or anger or frustration, when we feel helpless and hopeless, the Spirit prays on our behalf. How wonderful is that?

The Holy Spirit is not just given to individuals for their own benefit, but to the church. God the Three in One can be described as Lover, Beloved and Love; and the Spirit is the Love who holds the three together. In the same way it is the Spirit who holds the community of the Church together.

What is the Spirit doing in our parish today? What does the Spirit want to say to us? We can hear the voice of the Spirit in the words of Scripture, in our times of prayer, and in the wisdom that comes from God's people. We can see the work of the Spirit as people grow in faith and are eager to learn more. How do *you* think the Spirit might be working in you, or in your family, or in the parish?

In three weeks' time we will hold our Annual Meeting of Parishioners, which might not sound terribly 'spiritual' because we look at reports from parish organisations; the financial report and budget; and elect church wardens and members of Parish Council. All very practical, we might think.

But actually all this gives us a strong indication of the spiritual health of the parish. If the parish is financially healthy it's because people are giving prayerfully and sacrificially; if groups are reaching out in loving service, they are being led by the Spirit to care for others; and if we appoint leaders who are themselves open to the Spirit's leading then we are heading in the right direction.

As we remember the strange and wonderful things that happened when the Spirit came upon those first followers of Jesus, we might wonder why **we** don't see flames and hear a violent wind or suddenly have the ability to speak another language; or perhaps we're quietly glad we don't!

The Spirit still works in the church today, inspiring and encouraging, prompting and strengthening, giving gifts of all kinds as we live and work and grow together as God's people. Let us pray that we will be ever more aware of the Spirit working in our lives so that we can't help but tell the world the Good News.

The Lord be with you.