

2019-06-09 Sue Diggory
Pentecost – Acts 2 1 – 21 and John 14 8 – 17

Last week we were standing on the Mount Olives watching Jesus go ... the cloud enfolded him and he was lifted up into heaven. We are told the disciples returned to Jerusalem *'with great joy, and they were continually in the temple blessing God.'* They would never see the physical Jesus again, yet they were not it seems dejected and sad, rather they were focused and filled with joy as they set out across the Kidron Valley having been reminded once again of what Jesus had promised would happen to them in the upper room on the night before he went to the cross. The promise that we are reminded of through our Gospel reading today as John takes us back to that pre-Easter night and Jesus' words of comfort; *I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever.*

And now as they walked back to the city some 40 days later they knew what they needed to do, to wait, to wait for Jesus' promise to be fulfilled and for them to be *clothed with power from on high.* Well that was last week, or to be more exact Ascension Day and now 10 days later it is Pentecost and the Easter season is finally complete and at a close.

What do you think of when you hear the word Pentecost?

I suspect many of us think of fire and wind and the onslaught of a violent storm. Perhaps for some of us it is the often seen Sunday School image of the gathered disciples with little flames settled on the top of their heads, or maybe we think of speaking in many languages, languages that although spoken by rough Galilean fishermen were understood by gathered Jews from all over the diaspora or perhaps it is the thought that they had already had too much wine even though it was only 9 o'clock in the morning!

But there is of course so much more to Pentecost. It is all too easy for us either to get caught up in these strange details spending all our time trying to analyse exactly what happened, or to gloss over them almost without a second thought as this reading from Acts can become so familiar that we see Pentecost as just part of the annual church cycle, yes, the hinge point between Ascension Day and Trinity Sunday, but in many ways just another day to be marked each year.

But, the reality is that Pentecost and the out pouring of the Holy Spirit marked a new beginning. The disciples were now being equipped to fulfil the commission for mission that they had been given by Christ to tell his story to the world, to begin to speak up and speak out, to leave the fear that had gripped them as they had huddled together in that locked room after the resurrection behind them forever. The reality was that transformation was happening and life for them would never be the same.

Let's spend a few moments looking at the difference Pentecost made to Peter.

Peter was the one who had sworn he would die rather than disown Jesus, but we know too well that fear overcame him and that not only did Peter disown Jesus as he sat warming

himself by the brazier outside the high priests house he *began to curse and swore an oath [saying] I did not know this man you are talking about.* And now at Pentecost we experience a man who has been totally transformed, a man who is willing to boldly speak up about, and out about the Saviour he had so readily denied.

Men of Judea and all who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you and listen to what I say ... and we know from Luke's account that what Peter said on that first Pentecost Sunday had a huge impact and on that day three thousand persons were added and the church came into being.

Where for Peter there had been a fearful unwillingness to share his faith, there was now a real passion, a fearless passion to share his faith with everyone and this becomes even clearer as we read on in the book of Acts. When up before Caiaphas and the Jewish Council and being forbidden to speak of Jesus, Peter replied *we cannot keep from speaking about what we have seen and heard* and on encountering the crippled beggar by the Gate Beautiful at the Temple, in many ways Peter was even bolder as he proclaimed *I have no silver or gold, but what I have I give to you; in the name of Jesus of Nazareth, stand up and walk.* And he did!

So what does Pentecost mean for us today?

Let's go back to Peter's words that day as he proclaimed God's message through the words of the prophet Joel *In the last days it will be, God declares that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh.*

Not just on the disciples gathered in Jerusalem, not just on the three thousand who were baptised that day, not just on the crippled beggar who sat at the Gate Beautiful and not just on those we read about Luke's account of the early church, and not just on the wonderful Saints past and present that we can name. No, the promise is for ALL, and that includes you and me. The Advocate that Jesus had promised was now a reality for all and Pentecost means that Jesus is forever present with us, not as a physical presence but through the invisible energising presence of the Holy Spirit.

Just as Peter was transformed by the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost and beyond, we too have the promise of that same transformational power to be at work in our lives to day as individual followers of Christ but also as a community or fellowship that follows Christ, because at Pentecost it was the gathered disciples who were empowered as they gathered together obediently waiting in Jerusalem.

Pentecost means the church is empowered as a community and not just as a group of individuals. Pentecost was a communal experience, and it was only because they were together that *all of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.* A group of individuals who were all very different, but all transformed by the Holy Spirit as they gathered in Jerusalem that day.

Just like us gathered here today, a group of individuals who are all different but all capable of transformation by the Holy Spirit, that is if we are willing to welcome Him continually into our lives, if we are wanting to grow in our relationship with Christ, if we are ready and expectant, not just today because it is Pentecost, but each and every day as we continue our journey with Jesus.

Pentecost enabled the disciples to 'go public' and that caused the church to come into being. Jesus had been raised from the dead, shown to be Lord and Saviour, but they didn't know how to talk about it, and as we know the disciples didn't have the courage to speak of it. But at Pentecost the Holy Spirit came and a new wind of mission work was let loose upon the earth, a wind of mission that is still blowing today.

Pentecost means that God empowered the church to reach out with the good news of Christ. At Pentecost, the Holy Spirit moves the church from the safety of locked doors in the Upper Room into the struggles and realities of the world's needs, needs that needed the message of Jesus then and needs it even more today.

The question is are we willing to let the events of Pentecost make a difference to us as individuals and as a church community today?

Are we willing to say 'come Holy Spirit' and empower us?

And are we willing to be empowered and transformed as He sees fit and not just as we feel is safe and manageable.

Are we willing to be those who are prepared to trust in Christ's promise that *I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever.*

At the end of the service we will have the opportunity to share as individuals and as a church family in a Pentecost Commissioning, an opportunity to come before God and pledge ourselves to be those who are willing and wanting to be a Pentecost people, not just for today but for everyday as we welcome the presence of Christ, through the Holy Spirit afresh each and every day into our lives.

Amen.