

## Acts 2: 1-21 – When the Spirit comes

Prayer – call for Holy Spirit

It's disappointing, isn't it? I was thinking this week – what's the good news for St Luke's when it seems no-one wants to come and be the Vicar? I'm not sure it's helpful to resort to clichés and well-worn spiritual sentiments; I'll try to avoid them, but please let me know afterwards; you can be the cliché monitor if you like!

Our readings today, especially the one from Acts are probably familiar – some of us like to see how the reader of the day gets on with the residents of Mesopotamia, Cappadocia, Phrygia and Pamphylia. And how do we get on with finding these places on a map? Basically Luke, who wrote Acts, was saying that there were people in Jerusalem from north, south, east and west. And where were Jesus' followers – roughly we are told about 120 of them? They were safe enough – *all together in one place*. And they were praying – to be fair they had been praying a lot since Jesus left them on Ascension Day. But not just praying; they had been doing some admin. Judas, one of the Twelve disciples, top table chap, thinking of the Last Supper picture. Anyway he proved to be a rotten apple, betraying Jesus and so they organised a replacement and Matthias got the gig. Saying their prayers, doing the admin, all safe together – very Anglican, we might think.

And then the Spirit came – rushing wind, tongues of fire and all kinds of languages – rather less Anglican maybe. Next scene – streets of Jerusalem and people are asking questions – *what's going on here then?* Some, quite a few it seems, jumped to the conclusion that they were drunk – not a comment often heard of folk leaving church on a Sunday morning. But it gave Peter his chance to tell them this was the Bible promised – we just heard his first point in our reading. He went on to talk about Jesus and invited people to believe and be baptised, to repent – that is, change their ways, and they too would receive the Holy Spirit. In the morning there were about 120 believers and by the evening there were over 3,000. That first Pentecost Sunday was quite a day and we can read what happened next in the Book of Acts. It's headed Acts of the Apostles, but perhaps more accurately we could call it the Acts of the Holy Spirit.

What do Donald Trump, Nigel Farage and the Holy Spirit have in common? Well, one thing perhaps – disruption and change. Better move on swiftly – Jesus' followers changed from being in a safe place in a large room to being outside in the streets. People noticed there was something different about them. People could understand them in their own language. I don't pretend to understand, and there's no way we can replicate that. But when the Spirit comes in power things change and opportunities open up to speak about Jesus. The Spirit turned the church outwards to others and the church grew.

Pentecost Sunday – we ought to have some tongues really – so here we go – sing *Tukutendereze* – I think I have sung that before. It's in Luganda, it's the song of the east African revival. If we go back not quite a hundred years to Uganda we find an Anglican church that was founded by missionaries of the Church Missionary Society (CMS). They came and taught the Bible faithfully, they taught about Jesus' work on the cross, about his resurrection, about the need for repentance, having a personal faith in Jesus. They taught that this was for Europeans and Africans alike. Generally Africans worshipped in their own language – and there are about 40 different languages in Uganda. *Mukama yebazibwe* and *Pak Rwot* both mean *Praise the Lord* – but they sound totally different, one in a language of the south of the country, one from the north. Much of the worship was translation from the Prayer Book and the songs were translations of *Hymns Ancient and Modern*. And under the

surface in this church there were all kinds of currents – bubbling resentments and ill-feeling and jealousy. There were all kinds of feelings of cultural and racial superiority – all under the surface of Anglican politeness and possibly not even recognised. The east Africa revival began when slowly, one by one, the Holy Spirit began to prompt and bring Africans and Europeans alike to their knees to acknowledge their need and come to the cross in repentance. People began to confess to one another and ask forgiveness for their wrong attitudes. The Spirit moved from the head only to the heart. And one result was an explosion of evangelism throughout the whole region. No one put together a mission strategy; no preacher had to browbeat the congregation to go and share the Gospel. The good news just flowed.

So as I said at the beginning we are disappointed that we're probably not going to get a Vicar this year. This long vacancy is not unusual and the longer a vacancy goes on, some things tend to happen. We can drift and lose our vision and enthusiasm. Congregations often tend to turn inward and get a bit fractious. We'll keep Sundays going and we'll keep saying our prayers together and we'll keep the admin in order and try to keep things tidy. Does that perhaps remind us a little of that room in Acts? Do we dare pray – Come, Holy Spirit, and turn us inside out? Do we dare ask the Holy Spirit to come and ruffle our feathers and ask the question – why have we had no applicants? Are we prepared for the Holy Spirit to come and direct us outward so we will dare talk about Jesus outside this place? Those early followers of Jesus spoke the good news in the language of the people who had come to Jerusalem. I find myself constantly asking in my prayers how can I speak the good news to my friends and colleagues at the Town Council across the river? I know that Nicki is asking the question how she can best speak the good news to the people she meets through her work as well-being chaplain. How do you speak the good news in the places where you are Monday to Saturday?

What does it mean to call on the Holy Spirit when we are in vacancy? Someone might say – that's obvious – we want the Spirit to call someone to come and be our Vicar. But maybe that's asking the Holy Spirit to come and work on our agenda please. Might the Lord be teaching us to ask differently... what is the Holy Spirit's agenda for us over the next few months? I don't know, but I do know it's almost certainly not keeping in a safe place and making sure our admin's tidy!

We had a meeting of some of the ministry team earlier this week and it really struck Anna that it would be good for us as five churches – here, Tidenham, Chase, St Briavel's and Hewelsfield to meet together once a month or so for a time of worship and teaching – to build us up together in the power of the Spirit. So we'll do that – first one on Monday 30<sup>th</sup> of this month. Gathering together to equip us to go out into our communities with the good news of Jesus.

And in the meantime we'll pray – not come Holy Spirit and bless our agenda, but come Holy Spirit and bend us to your agenda. Come Holy Spirit, change us when we are feeling irritable and fractious and open our hearts to one another. Come, Holy Spirit and change us from fear of making mistakes or not doing it right – come Holy Spirit and make us ready to take risks for Jesus. Come Holy Spirit and take away our tendency to reach for the dustpan and brush just to keep everything tidy and help us to live with our loose ends. Come, Holy Spirit and deliver us from being inward-looking and open our eyes to the opportunities in our communities to share the good news of Jesus. Come, Holy Spirit as you came of old with wind and flame...