

Pentecost/Jubilee 2022

Tidenham and Tutshill Parish 5/6/22

Acts 2: 1-21 – Come Holy Spirit

Prayer

Well, what a day – the final day of Jubilee celebration and the first of Pentecost. I do hope you have enjoyed the last few days and are thankful for the Queen's faithfulness and integrity down the decades. She pledged herself to do her duty and that she has done to this day. In recent years her Christian faith has shone through, and she has provided an example of leadership for us all. We are thankful. But as well as being a time of gratitude the Jubilee gives us an opportunity for reflection at a time of transition. Much to the amazement of my 9 year-old grandsons who informed me last week that I was as old as time itself, the Queen has been there for all of my life and more, and so much has happened and changed in that time. Now it feels like transition – moving into a world post-Brexit, post-Covid – please God – with a war in Europe and political and economic uncertainty in our country. As David our Vicar pointed out last week it has all left many of us feeling weary. Joyful celebration/weary transition – rather a roller-coaster.

For the disciples of Jesus the last six weeks had been a roller-coaster for sure. Jesus had been betrayed and killed. A couple of days later he was raised from the dead. The disciples saw him – on and off – for about six weeks. He was teaching them until the day he returned to his Father and told them to go back to Jerusalem and wait for the Holy Spirit – coming soon. That's quite a lot to take in. So there they were – about 120 of them. They were good Jewish men and women and it was quite possible they were reciting the liturgy for Pentecost, celebrating the giving of the Torah, the Law, as well as the wheat harvest. Just imagine – candlelit room and the quiet chanting – *Blessed art thou, O God of our fathers...* when something happened. Like wind, flames, strange language... I wonder how long it took them to realise – **This is it**. This is what Jesus promised. This is what he told them to wait for and pray for. This was an entirely new experience for them, which is why it was marked so clearly for them with amazing signs of sight and sound. Make no mistake.

That's the story. Earlier Jesus had promised the disciples that whereas he was *with* them, the Holy Spirit would come and be *in* them. In a lovely phrase someone described the Holy Spirit as *God's present of Jesus' presence*. And that's a great reminder that when we think about knowing God, it's not a question of reading up enough theology, unless we are open to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. I know the little phrase can be misunderstood sometimes but there is still some mileage in it – *let go and let God*. It goes against the grain for some of us, I know because we like to be in control. Now of course I am not advocating that any of us should be out of control, but sometimes we can just be a little fearful of letting the Holy Spirit do anything in us and with us. Maybe we might trust God more? One of the most common commands in the New Testament is – *Don't be afraid!* Don't be afraid of the Holy Spirit.

But don't expect the Holy Spirit to come and make us feel comfortable either. It's easy if we feel weary to turn inward. But look in Acts – the Holy Spirit got these disciples up and out into the streets to engage in the first Christian mission. It was not well organised; there was no publicity, no strategy, no plans for follow-up... but that wasn't the point. The Holy Spirit did not let them wallow in all this experience of wind, flames and strange languages, thinking this is different, this is rather fun... Into the streets of Jerusalem. And what did people think? *Bewildered, amazed, astonished* – some of the words used. And some of them jumped to the conclusion that was obvious and wrong – *they're drunk!* I love Peter's riposte – *What? At nine o'clock in the morning?* Now I'm not sure this is the model for us to follow, but the whole point is that these Christians were so Christ-conscious they forgot to be self-conscious. They were out on the streets of Jerusalem talking about Jesus to anyone

regardless of whether they were Parthians or Medes or Elamites or any old resident of Mesopotamia.

The Holy Spirit makes Jesus real in our lives and gives us the power and purpose to share that with others. Do you know this song from Uganda – sing *Tukutendereze*. It's the song of the east Africa Revival. There's so much I could tell you about this, but it happened in the 1930's and 40's in a church that had been founded by evangelical missionaries of CMS. They taught the Bible, they taught about Christ's work on the cross, about the need for repentance and coming to faith in Jesus. This was needed for European and African alike. But under the surface all sorts of things were going on – bubbling resentment and ill-feeling, anger and hurt that were not dealt with. There were all sorts of feelings of cultural superiority – all under the surface and often not even recognised for what it was. The east Africa revival happened when slowly one by one the Holy Spirit began to prompt and bring African Christians and European Christians to their knees before the cross in repentance. The Spirit went far deeper than head knowledge. And the result of all this was an explosion of evangelism throughout the region. No one had to persuade people to tell others about Jesus – the good news just flowed.

And it flowed across cultures as it did in Acts and does today. Our passage in Acts teaches us that the Holy Spirit speaks many languages, and not just languages. The Holy Spirit is at home in many cultures. In Jerusalem there were visitors, pilgrims, tourists from north, south, east and west, and they all understood those disciples speaking about God's deeds of power. And they didn't even need Google Translate! Praise God that the Holy Spirit speaks Ukrainian. He also speaks Russian. The good news is not tied to any one language or culture. There are some people who think God speaks 17th century English. Of course he does, but he also speaks the twenty-first century varieties. But what we get from our passage is the Holy Spirit speaks through willing Christians – here in Acts it's Peter who is the spokesman. And his message is clear – and it's not you too can have an exciting experience of the Holy Spirit like us. No – we find the message at the end of verse 21 – the good news is the story of Jesus, and from verse 22 onwards Peter is focused entirely on Jesus. It's a constant challenge, isn't it? How do we communicate the good news of Jesus in a culture where increasingly people do not have the language that we are familiar with here in church? How do we speak of Jesus in the language of people who do not know the language of church? Thank God for the gift of the Spirit who is there before us.

So Jubilee and Pentecost – plenty to make us grateful. More widely a transition time perhaps, unsettling, wearying, challenging, uncertain... And in it all – unshakeable – the love of God; over it all the cross of Jesus and to us all – the gift of the Holy Spirit. In the words of an ancient hymn:

*Come Holy Ghost, our souls inspire,
And lighten with celestial fire.*

Come indeed Holy Spirit, Spirit of a thousand tongues, come and refresh us, bend us to your purpose and fill us with your power.