

Pentecost 2015

Well, the waiting is over, the great day has dawned, the Spirit has been poured out on the world, and mayhem has been released. But we sit quietly here, listening (I hope) intently, unmoved, not particularly fired up, passive, when the whole thrust of the Spirit is action, movement, burning desire. We have come a long way from that first Pentecost!

As I write, the Vicarage dog is still leaning up against me, the world continues outside in its own sweet way, and I am left wondering, “how did things come to settle down so much?” Some would blame Constantine, by making Christianity the religion of the Roman Empire. Others would seek to put the blame on the Anglican Settlement the Tudors brought in, that was reinforced by the Church during the reign of Charles II, that could lead to the phrase, “he preached for 35 years without enthusiasm” being a compliment on a clergyman’s memorial.

But we know that it is not any of those things. High tempo living can only be sustained for a short period of time. We need to live in the long term, steadily, with perseverance and continuity. The daily round, the common task – that is where we are called to serve our God, day in, day out – and the Early Church discovered that very quickly. Not long after Pentecost, the disciples found that they were spending so much time meeting the physical needs of their congregation that they had to

appoint deacons to fulfil those functions, leaving them free to preach and teach the Gospel.

So what is happening here, in this strange story from the early days of the Church? It is an event which has not been repeated, even though each one of us, by our baptism, has shared in that same rush of wind and in those tongues of fire. It is an event which shook the world, and turned it the right way up. It is the fulfilment of everything that God ever wanted – God in us, no longer separate, out there, but rooted firmly and permanently in our hearts and souls.

What Pentecost does is change for ever our perspective on the place of God in the universe. In the early days, God was distant, unknowable, detached. Humanity rarely communicated with him, and if it did, it was on special occasions, and frequently after arduous ritual.

Then God stepped into history in the person of his Son, Jesus Christ – God no longer “out there” but with us, next to us, sharing our humanity, God in flesh and blood. But even that was limited – Jesus could be with his disciples in Galilee or Jerusalem, but not in both places at once. When Jesus was talking to some people, he was not talking to others. There was still a gap between God and humanity.

With Pentecost, and the giving of the Holy Spirit to the whole Church, God ceases to be “out there” but rather, “in here”, deep

within us, filling us, consuming us, making us holy, enabling us to live his life of love and power. We no longer need to ask, “Where is God?” for he is in our hearts and in our souls, he is amongst us as we gather for worship, he brings us here and holds us together as a family, encourages us to see him in each other, and to share his love and compassion with a needy world. It is Pentecost that does this, and that is why we rejoice.

And so we shall. We shall end this service in a way we never have before – we shall all be given a candle lit from the Easter Candle, to show that we share, by the Spirit, in the risen life of Christ. We shall promise to dare to live out the Spirit’s life within us, and we shall take that light out of the building and into the big wide world. The Easter Candle will be extinguished, as this season of resurrection has been replaced with the season of the Spirit – alleluia!

And the challenges remain:

- 25% congregation growth by Christmas
- 50% growth in active involvement
- Narrow the age gaps
- Greater inter-generational collaboration
- Renewal of volunteers within existing structures
- Increased visibility of our church by all means available
- Balance the books

And the Holy Spirit, in whose power we go, will fill us, inspire us, encourage us and propel us ever outward, filled with God’s love and compassion, to re-form the world into the way that it was always intended to be, to his eternal praise and glory.