

## St Francis Joint Holy Communion 4<sup>th</sup> June 2017

### Pentecost

**Acts 2:1-21**

**1 Corinthians 12:3b-13**

**John 20:19-23**

what sort of Pentecost are we hoping for today? we've just read two very contrasting 'Pentecost' stories: one is the familiar one from Acts 2, with its violent wind, tongues of fire, exuberant praise, a crowd gathered in the street and a big speech from Peter, leading thousands to turn to Christ

the other, from John 20, is behind locked doors, with the disciples full of fear and doubt, Jesus' gentle breathing of the Spirit and his quiet, 'as the Father sent me, so I send you'

which of these is more like us today, 'all together in place' at this joint service for Pentecost? what sort of Pentecost are we hoping for? are we hiding away in our safe church space, reassured by each other's presence, but uncertain how to face the world outside, like the disciples in John 20?

or are we more like those gathered for prayer after the Ascension in Acts 2, poised to receive the Holy Spirit, ready to rush out into the London Road, to preach the gospel to the passing traffic, who will stop to see the cause of our excitement, so we can call them to repentance and faith?

which is it to be? the inward or the outward? the fearful or the confident? I guess we are somewhere in between the two, a mixture of both, especially as we come together today from across the different styles and temperaments of the Parish

and the truth is, wherever we are on that spectrum, we all need the Holy Spirit – he is the common feature of both these versions of Pentecost, he is the one who moves the disciples on to the next stage; and he will do the same for us

do you remember those signs people used to display in their cars, 'A dog is for life, not just from Christmas'? that then got adapted to, 'Jesus is life, not just for Christmas'; perhaps we need another one, 'the Holy Spirit is for life, not just for Pentecost!'

Sue planted that thought, in my mind at least, when she preached a few weeks back, and I've been following it up on the Sundays since; here are some things we have touched on along the way:

what it means to be 'full' of the Holy Spirit, to be able to forgive others and to know God as our Father; the Holy Spirit as Jesus' presence with us, our Advocate and Counsellor, walking with us each day; the Holy Spirit as the one who reveals the truth of Jesus to us, and who strengthens us to bear witness to Christ through times of struggle and opposition ... and so on ...

much of that is about the place of the Spirit in our *individual* lives, as we seek to follow Christ day by day; but today it seems right to focus on the role of the Holy Spirit in our life *together* as Christ's church, his body, his people, his family

for that we have Paul's first letter to the church in Corinth; these Christians are full of the 'outward' signs of the Spirit, some of which are listed here – words of wisdom, gifts of healing, miracles, prophecy, speaking in tongues, and so on; but they're missing out on some of the more 'inward' expressions, and Paul has strong things to say about their relationships and their attitudes (read the letter!)

today's reading began with a litmus test, a guiding principle, when we look at our life together in the church: 'no one can say, "Jesus is Lord" except by the Holy Spirit'; we're missing here the bit before: 'no one speaking by the Spirit of God can say, "Jesus be cursed"'

so, if we want to know whether our relationships, attitudes, activities etc. are truly guided by the Holy Spirit, we just need to ask: 'is Jesus Lord in this? or are we following some other agenda, which takes us away from Jesus and his ways?'

I have 3 points(!) to draw out from this passage, about the work of Holy Spirit in our life together: first, *the Holy Spirit is for unity with diversity*; verses 4-6 make this point repeatedly:

'Now there are *varieties* of gifts, but the *same* Spirit; and there are *varieties* of services, but the *same* Lord; and there are *varieties* of activities, but it is the *same* God who activates all of them'

and when Paul lists the different gifts of the Spirit, in all their variety (verses 8-10), he repeats the refrain: 'according to the *same* Spirit ... by the *same* Spirit ... by the *one* Spirit ...'

variety is good and wonderful and enriching, but it should never be a cause for division in the church, because all that we are and all that we have comes from one and the same source

look around you – people of different ages and colours, from different churches, with different tastes in worship, different ways of thinking or talking about their faith, different enthusiasms and talents – there's great diversity here – hurrah!

but let none of us say to ourselves, because of those differences, either that we don't belong here, or that someone else doesn't belong here; as Paul goes on to say in this chapter, 'the body is not made up of one part but of many', and 'God has placed the parts in the body, just as he wanted them to be'; if God has put us in the same body, who are we to think things should be otherwise? *the Holy Spirit is for unity with diversity*

second, *the Holy Spirit is given for the common good*; [v.7] all the gifts and graces that are ours by the Spirit are not just for our own pleasure, comfort or self-glorification; they are there to be shared, in order to bless those around us

look around again, and see each one as a blessing from God to you, and yourself as a blessing to them; let's appreciate what each one brings to the mix; what C S Lewis calls 'that glorious ragbag of saints and fatheads that is the church of Jesus Christ'! say to your neighbour, 'you are God's gift to me'; and then say, 'I want to bless you in return'

this week we've two candidates coming for interview for the Team Vicar post; I know, from talking to them, that the diversity within our congregations and our community is something that attracts them to this post; they are excited by the opportunity and challenge that our diversity offers

I do hope, when they meet with some of us on Thursday and Friday, that we will get across to them our own sense of mutual respect and of appreciation for our differences; our unity with diversity can then be a positive affirmation of each other, not just a passive tolerance!

if the Holy Spirit is given for the common good, we too should work for the common good!

thirdly, *the Holy Spirit is a free agent*; verse 11, 'All these [gifts] are activated by one and the same Spirit, who allots to each one *just as the Spirit chooses*'; perhaps we are sometimes too keen to have everything under our control; we like to know just what is required of us, and what we can expect of others; we don't like surprises in the church, and that can squeeze out the new things that the Holy Spirit is seeking to do

are we open to the Spirit moving among us in new ways? are we able to recognise his work in ourselves or in others, giving us or them gifts that we hadn't expected? we've been praying 'Thy kingdom come' over the last ten days, but do we think anything is ever really going to change? that depends on us being willing to change!

it comes back to the kind of Pentecost story we imagine being enacted among us, whether we are stuck with the fearfulness and uncertainty of the disciples in John 20, or whether we can move on and share in their eagerness for the Holy Spirit in Acts 2

what kind of Pentecost, what kind of church, what kind of Parish do we want? it will involve holding a balance between the 'inward' and 'outward'

in 'Living Faith' or Mission Action Plan terms, we need to 'sustain the sacred centre', to pay attention to prayer, study, our own spiritual life; but from that inward attention we must turn outwards to the world around us, in order to 'make disciples' and 'make a difference in the world'

or, to think about it in another way: +Steven, the Bishop of Oxford, is urging us to be a church that is *contemplative, compassionate* and *courageous*; contemplative in our inward attention to God, and compassionate and courageous in our outward attention to the needs of the world

that is particularly poignant for us today, as we come to terms with yet another terror attack last night, a General Election next week, and Brexit to follow; we need to find a way to be followers of Jesus in such a changing world – and for that we need the Holy Spirit!

what sort of Pentecost are we hoping for today? what kind of church or Parish are we going to be? may we allow the Holy Spirit to guide us into unity with diversity, and to work together for the common good; and may we recognise that the Holy Spirit is a free agent, a 'wind that blows where it will', and may we be open to the movement of that wind and to embracing all that it may lead us into