

Pentecost Year C 2019

One of the things that I have found over the Fifty Great Days of Eastertide (which come to an end on this great Feast of Pentecost) is a rediscovered love of John's Gospel. We always hear from John in Holy Week and sometimes at Easter itself, but many of the Gospel readings for the whole season are taken from John, before we move back to Luke for the majority of Sunday Gospel readings for the rest of the Church's Year.

There is something wonderful about the vividness of much of John's storytelling, designed to draw us into the action of the Lord's journey, so that it become our journey too. John also uses rather dense theological reflections. Sometimes these seem to take us around in circles, but what John is seeking to do is to allow us to ponder the mystery of God's Love, bound up intimately with the grace of Jesus Christ. He wants us to work at our own understanding of being drawn into the divine story. To this should be coupled (and this is very important) the way he wants us to understand that the unity Jesus talks of with the Father becomes intimately bound up with **our own** lives and journeys.

On this Day it would be easy to concentrate on Luke's account of Pentecost in Acts - another account told with vividness – you might say glorious technicolour. Luke also uses storytelling and reflections as a way of drawing us into an understanding of the continual transformation which is the true of journey of a person of faith. What it is NOT is an account about an easy way to learn a language. Nor an advert for British Gas! Luke is using various imagery taken from the Hebrew Scriptures which enabling us to know of the way in which our lives can be Spirit-led to the point of this overflowing into the lives of all those we meet. This is the point of his message here. Ordinary people (Galileans – in other words - country yokels) start to transform the world by spreading the Good News of Jesus Christ through allowing the overflowing grace of the Holy Spirit within their lives. Some will be open to being led on a journey - *All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, 'What does this mean?' Others won't be - Others sneered and said, 'They are filled with new wine.'* It will be the same in every age and place.

In this age of cynicism, Christianity has the greatest answer to the problems that beset us. From individualism, tribalism and just plain hatred, we have something to live and proclaim which enables us to turn the phrase of Donald Trump's oft-quoted tweet earlier this week on its head (and I make no political point here – he was responding to disgraceful comments by the Mayor of London). In following Jesus Christ, there are no 'stone-cold losers,' but, through the power of the Holy Spirit, only 'red-hot winners'!

Our Gospel reading takes us again to the Last Supper, and finds Philip pondering the place of Jesus within a faith context. Jesus talks of his intimate relationship with the Father, before reflecting on the response of the believer to this relation love: *Philip said to him, 'Lord, show us the Father, and we will be satisfied.'* *Jesus said to him, 'Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and you still do not know me? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father.'*

Jesus then talks of the advocate – the comforter – the Spirit of truth. We see later in the Gospel that John's understanding of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit within humanity is as essential as the air we breathe. The moment when Jesus dies on the cross, John says – 'he

gave up the Spirit,' and when he then appears to the disciples on Easter Day, Jesus breathes the life of the Spirit upon them – an awakening of their full potential to proclaim the Gospel. All this reveals John's understanding of true Pentecost – the intimacy of the Holy Spirit present within creation and humanity in every age, time and individual.

There is a wonderful moment in *John 7* when we hear of the way in which the Holy Spirit can, if we allow it, work in and through us. Jesus is in the Temple for the Feast of Tabernacles, and on the last day of the festival it was the custom for water to be poured over the altar of sacrifice until it overflowed its enclosure and ran across the paving. This was meant to conjure up the vision of Ezekiel, who described waters flowing out to the end of the earth from the Holiest of Holies – a drawing of the whole of humanity to the knowledge of God's glory. *On the last day of the festival, the great day, while Jesus was standing there, he cried out, 'Let anyone who is thirsty come to me, and let the one who believes in me drink. As the scripture has said, "Out of the believer's heart shall flow rivers of living water."' Now he said this about the Spirit, which believers in him were to receive; for as yet there was no Spirit, because Jesus was not yet glorified. John 7: 37*

It is the most wonderful imagery. Jesus calling through all ages to people of every tribe, race and people. Through the self-giving love of Jesus; through passion, cross and death, in sharing the intimacies of the human journey from beginning to end, Jesus calls the whole of humanity to Resurrection Life here-and-now on our passage to the heart of God's Love – heaven's joy. This is none other than a new way of looking **at** and interacting **with** the world. We are each called to be rivers of living water, people proclaiming justice and peace; displaying the knowledge of God's Love and its availability for all who seek a new way of living within the world.

Does this seem an impossible way of life?

As I said, it is all too easy to slip into cynicism and a spiral of self-obsession. Yet through the work of the Holy Spirit within our lives we are summoned to transformation. However - and here's the thing – we are each responsible for lighting the blue touch paper to allow the work of the Spirit to realise its full potential within our lives. And it's a life-long task. Yet if we do, then we tread the path to glory, to the knowledge of our call to the Divine Life through the power of the Holy Spirit.

I love a little passage by Catherine of Siena which seems so appropriate today as we celebrate the inward working of the Holy Spirit within our own lives:

*Eternal Godhead, Mystery as profound as the sea,
what more could You give me than Yourself;
You are the fire which ever burns without being consumed;
You consume in Your heat all the soul's self-love;
You are the fire which takes away all cold;
with Your light You illuminate me so that I may know all Your truth;
You are that light above all light, which illuminates the eye of my intellect,
clarifying the light of faith so abundantly and so perfectly,
that I see that my soul is alive, and in this light receives You—the true light.*



Pentecost - Jean II Restout (1692 – 1768)

Acts 2:1-22

When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.

Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. 6 And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each. Amazed and astonished, they asked, 'Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language? Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, 11 Cretans and Arabs—in our own languages we hear them speaking about God's deeds of power.' All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, 'What does this mean?' But others sneered and said, 'They are filled with new wine.'

But Peter, standing with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed them: 'Men of Judea and all who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and listen to what I say. 15 Indeed, these are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only nine o'clock in the morning. 16 No, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel:

"In the last days it will be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh,
and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,
and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams.
Even upon my slaves, both men and women, in those days I will pour out my Spirit;
and they shall prophesy. And I will show portents in the heaven above
and signs on the earth below, blood, and fire, and smoky mist.

The sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood, before the coming of the Lord's great and glorious day.

Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved."

'You that are Israelites, listen to what I have to say: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with deeds of power, wonders, and signs that God did through him among you, as you yourselves know—

Romans 8: 14-17

All who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, 'Abba! Father!' it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ—if, in fact, we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him.

John 14: 8-17

Philip said to him, 'Lord, show us the Father, and we will be satisfied.' Jesus said to him, 'Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and you still do not know me? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, "Show us the Father"? Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own; but the Father who dwells in me does his works. Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; but if you do not, then believe me because of the works themselves. Amen, amen, I tell you, the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these, because I am going to the Father. I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If in my name you ask me for anything, I will do it.

'If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you for ever. This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you.