

Pentecost 2018 – Year B

There is something undeniably powerful about the reading we have heard from the Acts of the Apostles this morning. It seems so vivid, so full of how, perhaps, we wish the spirit to act both within ourselves and within the Church that the words of the Gospel Reading seem to be rather earnest and opaque. There is a darkness in the Gospel reading – we are, after all, at the Last Supper and the Lord is seeking to lead the disciples on a journey of knowing what true discipleship in faith terms means, and they can't know the full meaning until after his death and resurrection. Paul does rather better in his description of the 'whole creation groaning in labour pains,' with imagery that ties in rather better with the ecstatic nature of Luke's Pentecost.

What does Pentecost actually mean?

When we think of our lives, there will be moments when we seem almost to hear in a new language or look at things through new eyes. The familiar seem to echo with something new often tied up with our deepest desires and longings – something deep within our interiority. It is almost as if it has always been there inside us, but we are hearing it experiencing it for the first time. These, to me, are real Pentecost moments, moments when the true 'self' floods the everyday 'me.'

Falling in love can be one of these moments. No longer do we hear just words. We experience an overwhelming sense of oneness found in presence and union. We seem to see things differently – the grass is greener than it has ever seemed before, the birds sing our song, we are on the mountain top close to the sun, and deep inside us we feel that this is our place, our moment, our world.

A call to vocation can be like this. This is a moment when you find that you are going in a direction led by God. Although when we talk of 'vocation, we tend to think of the caring professions or religious vocation, but really vocation can be anything which leads us on a journey which positively affects the lives of others. On my own score (and I know this is a religious example!) I experienced a moment of call when I least expected it. A chance word from a friend, and deep inside me I knew that I had to place my absolute trust in God – that was a Pentecost moment of a different kind. My steady life-style was turned upside down – and here we are today in Cuckfield.

When we experience loss or sorrow and that small voice speaks words of comfort and embrace and brings light to darkness – then we now God's presence comforting and our abiding in Divine Love – the presence ever with us, ever longing to for us to know that ultimately, we are treasured; the reconciliation with someone we have turned aside from, the chance to express a love which eradicates hatred or bitterness of heart, encouragement to those who need encouraging, sometimes speaking with truth to turn those going in the wrong direction God-ward..

These and a multitude of moments are Pentecost moments - signs of the Spirit of God at work within our lives – all leading to transformation. They seem so different from the account in Acts: *'a sound like the rush of a violent wind, 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.

Goodness, how I long for that ability to speak in French or German without having to learn the language! But this, of course, trivialises the passage and it turns it into Sunday School reading of Scripture. Luke is conjuring up for us an understanding of the power of the Spirit by linking it to the passages of Moses and the Children of Israel experiencing the presence of God at the giving of the Torah – the Law. But here, the dynamic moves from Law to you and me. We become vessels of grace to humanity, a sign of the Redeeming Love of God made known within our humanity. We don't need to look for tongues of fires or the sound of rush wind, because WE ARE the signs of the working of the Holy Spirit. Indeed, we limit our ability to respond to the call of God within our lives if we get bogged down looking for the lames and listening for the wind.

That great list of people who hear in their own languages provide us with the universal relevance of our faith in Jesus Christ. There is no restriction, no bar to becoming a Christian. It doesn't matter who or what you are or have done. If you have a sincere desire to allow the Holy Spirit to work within you, knowing and seeking to emulate and learn from Jesus Christ throughout your life, you are called to Pentecost Life! Pentecost cannot be linked to time and place – it is a universal call. Although Luke wants to provide us with powerful imagery, this is only to lead us on a journey – wants us to know that we are called Godward within our lives – always works in progress, and this personal gift will cause us to wonder at the things within our lives which reveal the working of the Holy Spirit, the abiding of the Lord with each one of us on our journey of life.

The Head of the American Episcopal Church preached eloquently (and passionately and rather dramatically!) yesterday at the royal wedding, finishing with words of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, the great French philosopher and theologian. They are words I am fond of quoting myself (I know that I have before!), because they do sum up the essence of our Pentecost lives – here is a fuller version than he used: *Being happy is a matter of personal taste. The world is round so that friendship may encircle it. Someday, after mastering the winds, the waves, the tides and gravity, we shall harness for God the energies of love, and then, for a second time in the history of the world, humanity will have discovered fire.*

In the saving grace of Jesus Christ, who gave himself in selfless love for each one of us on the cross, **we** are all called to selfless Pentecost filled lives of love in which we know the comfort and work of God at all times. Nothing could be more wonderful, because through this we transform the world.



Pentecost 1732 by Jean II Restout

Acts 2

When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. ² 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.

³ Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. ⁴ All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.

⁵ 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.

⁷ Amazed and astonished, they asked, 'Are not all these who are speaking Galileans?' ⁸ And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language?

⁹ Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, ¹⁰ 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.'

¹² All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, 'What does this mean?'

¹³ But others sneered and said, 'They are filled with new wine.'
¹⁴ 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:

¹⁷ "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.

¹⁸ Even upon my slaves, both men and women,
in those days I will pour out my Spirit;
and they shall prophesy.

¹⁹ And I will show portents in the heaven above
and signs on the earth below,
blood, and fire, and smoky mist.

²⁰ The sun shall be turned to darkness
and the moon to blood,

before the coming of the Lord's great and glorious day.

²¹ Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved."

Romans 8:22-27

²² We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labour pains until now; ²³ and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies. ²⁴ For in^[a] hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen? ²⁵ But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.

²⁶ Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes^[c] with sighs too deep for words. ²⁷ And God, who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.^[f]

John 15:26-27

²⁶ 'When the Advocate comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who comes from the Father, he will testify on my behalf. ²⁷ You also are to testify because you have been with me from the beginning. 'I did not say these things to you from the beginning, because I was with you. ⁵ But now I am going to him who sent me; yet none of you asks me, "Where are you going?" ⁶ But because I have said these things to you, sorrow has filled your hearts. ⁷ Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Advocate^[a] will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you. ⁸ And when he comes, he will prove the world wrong about sin and righteousness and judgement: ⁹ about sin, because they do not believe in me; ¹⁰ about righteousness, because I am going to the Father and you will see me no longer; ¹¹ about judgement, because the ruler of this world has been condemned.

¹² 'I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. ¹³ When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own, but will speak whatever he hears, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. ¹⁴ He will glorify me, because he will take what is mine and declare it to you. ¹⁵ All that the Father has is mine. For this reason I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you.