

St Brandon's, Sermon for Pentecost, 20th May 2018
Acts 2.1-21; Romans 8.22-27; John 15.26-27, 16.4b-15

Pentecost and Prophecy

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Pentecost marks the end of the 50 days since Easter.

It marks the moment when the disciples changed from being followers of Jesus to being leaders in his name.

The moment when all the confusion and uncertainty of loss at Easter, becomes certainty and sending out, through the confusion of tongues of speech and fire, wind and power that accompanied the arrival of the Holy Spirit.

It hasn't been an instant change, it has taken several shifts.

The first shift was Jesus' death which destroyed all their expectations of who Jesus was and what he was going to achieve.

The second shift was the resurrection which began to show the disciples who Jesus really was, and what that might mean for them.

The ascension opened up the space and made the disciples realise they really were called to action, but only with the coming of the Spirit at Pentecost could they be empowered now to act.

The Spirit gives them the confidence and insight and gifts that they need to carry out the work they have been commissioned to do, taking the gospel to every race and nation.

Remember Peter before Easter, falling asleep in the garden of Gethsemane, denying Jesus in the temple courtyard: frightened

and failing? Remember the risen Jesus challenging him to love him and feed his sheep? Now, the Spirit-filled Peter is speaking with authority to quell the confusion and open scripture to the crowd who have gathered to witness this extraordinary event. Peter goes on to found the church.

He has found this ability and authority through being Spirit-filled, and working thereafter in the power of the Spirit.

Peter speaks with authority to the mix of people who hear, and who jeer, but what is it he first quotes?

Interestingly, its not the words of Jesus, he doesn't refer at all to the provision Jesus had told them he would make which we heard from John's gospel today: Jesus explicitly telling Peter and the other disciples that he will send them the Advocate, the Spirit of truth.

Peter starts with the word from Joel, written about 600 years before Christ, prophesying that God will, in the last days, pour out his Spirit upon all.

This establishes the *significance* of this astonishing and crazy event – all this noise and commotion and speaking in foreign languages - as a long-awaited promise of God, a fulfilment of Jewish scripture.

It *prepares* the listeners for what follows, (if you were to read on from what we heard today), which is a detailed and impassioned speech from Peter about who Jesus was and is, with further scriptural linking.

Peter's speech is sufficiently compelling that 3,000 persons were baptised and added that day.

This is the power of the Spirit that has taken hold of Peter!

This is the first illustration of the power of the Spirit of truth who comes from the Father and will testify on Jesus' behalf. The Spirit enables those first Christians to discern and explore and understand the truth and significance of who Jesus is, and who he is in relation to the Father and Spirit; that he is the one and same God. It enables them to understand what his death and resurrection and ascension have achieved, and the vitality of that belief.

This unfolding revelation is recorded in Acts, and in the letters of Paul and others to the new churches, making clear what is true, and urging them not to be led astray by false teachings.

The revelation and clarification goes on unfolding and has resulted in the collected wisdom of the great theologians we can learn from today.

The revelation and clarification goes on unfolding within each of us as we experience the Spirit opening our eyes and understanding as we grow in the faith.

So this Spirit that we receive has the task of shifting us, step by step, towards a fuller, and fuller understanding of who Jesus is for us, who he is within us, and what he is doing in our world; the ability to pray that strange phrase '*Thy Kingdom come*' with a dawning understanding of what it might mean.

Earlier in the service we prayed in the Collect for the Spirit to grant us right judgement in all things and evermore to rejoice in his holy comfort.

Holy comfort because the Spirit, the advocate, is sent to console the disciples as well as being an accuser and judge against the world.

Paul talks about the Spirit helping us in our weakness, and being the prayer on our behalf when we don't know what or how to pray.

That is like a spiritual openness, letting the Spirit be that interceder that can read our hearts and work in us.

The work itself is one of exposing the truth to us.

The Spirit of all truth who will guide us is working to show us the truth about ourselves.

How much do we really want and long to know the truth?

Enough to let the Spirit keep the door of our understanding propped open?

Seems to me that we are pretty adept at keeping the door shut on truth if we can, hiding from truth behind the stories we prefer to tell ourselves.

But the Spirit is gentle, sent to be our guide, what he will reveal, he will be ready to heal.

We need to be ready to work with the Spirit if we are to progress and be shifted to new understanding, and shifted towards the compassion of the undefended heart.

The opening up of our hearts and the sharpening of our judgement is necessary for us in building the kingdom. To have *right judgement* is to get beyond our narrow prejudices and self-interest, it is to aspire to balance mercy and justice, viewing the world with the eyes of Christ. If we have right judgement, right action will follow, or at very least, be our aim.

We are at the end of the ten days of prayer that we have joined with globally through the novena prayer booklets, praying for a fresh wave of the Spirit to transform our world, surprise us, and make ‘Thy Kingdom come’.

We are at the end of Christian Aid week. Many of us will have been out collecting for the victims of hurricanes in Haiti, and following the personal story of Marcelin and his three daughters. Christian Aid have chosen to use Marcelin’s weakness to be the strength of their appeal, his inability to act to be our boldness in knocking on doors, his helplessness to help us change a tiny bit of our world for the better.

Last week, Geoff reminded us of Rick’s question, “What is it that makes us distinctive as Christians?”

A big part of that answer, is, I think, doing these sorts of things *because* we are Spirit-led people.

Being Spirit-led offers this *other dimension* out of which we speak and act.

The Spirit is given to us for those purposes of revealing truth not only to ourselves, about ourselves, to transform us, but doing

that for the effect that transformation brings into everything we engage with.

It is given to us for the purposes that Joel spelled out: so “*Your sons and daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams.*”

What are the dreams you dream for the world?

What’s your vision of a right society?

Who do you admire, listen to, follow?

I hate these sort of questions, they always make me feel inadequate as I can’t think what I would answer, so I’ll ask them in another way:

What feels really pointless, and what brings hope?

What has to shift to move from one to the other?

If we are called to prophesy, to the extent that we are Spirit-filled, what does that feel like?

How do we do it?

And who do we see as the prophets in our world today?

I’m going to leave you with those thoughts to dwell on. After coffee we will gather for discussion in the Neville chapel, there’s no need to say anything if you don’t want, just listening might be enough for you, but sharing is good too. And it would be lovely if you would join us.