

2021-05-23 ... 10am Pentecost Sermon ... Revd Sue Armstrong

Acts 2: 1 – 21; John 15: 26 – 27; 16: 4b – 15

The words we use to describe today don't really do it justice – '*pentecostia*' means 50, fifty days after Passover.

The alternative we might have been used to, *Whitsun*, describes the usual dress, White Sunday, because of the way in which it was celebrated with people wearing white. The Whit Walks were a feature of many communities and were particularly strong in Lancashire. They witnessed to the importance of the day, the day that celebrates the birthday of the Church.

The disciples knew about change – in the last few years they had seen plenty of it. Jesus had called them out of their ordinary lives and jobs ... they had travelled to different places ... met very different people ... changed their way of thinking – and their way of thinking about God ... experienced a whole new way of living. They had lived through the Crucifixion – Jesus being dead and Jesus being alive again!

Now they were waiting for another change, not quite knowing what the Holy Spirit would do to them, but knowing it was important to be ready for it.

Since Easter the disciples had been learning to let go of the familiar presence of their teacher and friend, reassured by his promise of the coming of the Holy Spirit, and here in our reading we learn just how that was, how it came and how lives were further changed.

So today we celebrate with the disciples as they are filled with joy!

Whatever they had imagined it might be like, the actual experience overwhelms them. From feeling destitute without Jesus' presence they now sense him with them more deeply and closely than before.

All the things Jesus had patiently tried to explain to them they can understand more clearly – as if a lightbulb has been switched on in their thinking. All Jesus' urgency for telling people the good news now fills them with a zeal they had never known before. Suddenly the most important thing for them is to communicate God's love to those who don't know it. The ability to speak in the different languages of the visitors to Jerusalem is all part of it, this new love for people, which can't wait to let them in on the secret of real freedom.

The Holy Spirit coming like flame sets the disciples hearts on fire with love for God and for other people. They were stunned by this display of the power of God ... God meant business and was clearly way outside their control. God was in charge!

They wanted to tell everyone about how wonderful God is. God's love in them made them want to share the good news, rather than keeping it to themselves.

God is still pouring out his Holy Spirit on people every day. Whenever any-one seriously wants to have the powerful love of God living in them, the Spirit will come and fill them. Often we don't really want God that close – perhaps we're scared of God being really powerful; but we forget that with power that is full of love and goodness we don't need to be afraid.

Mostly we just aren't bothered enough to take God seriously. The disciples were spending all day in God's company, waiting and praying for the Holy Spirit to come. But how much time do we focus our attention on God? When we want something really badly it fills our attention, we read the adverts, talk to people with experience, research online and so on ...

So if each of us, and all of us as a church, are impressed by today's reading and seriously want a fresh outpouring of the Holy Spirit what can we do?

We can really want more of God in our lives. We can want it so much that we start listening to God and getting our lives ready to receive his gift. We can put God at the centre instead of being squeezed out to the edge. And God will come to us, filling us with his Holy Spirit, and transforming our lives.

For some it will come as an empowering, for some it will come bringing peace, for others joy and for others still, as a desire, a need to work for the benefit of others, following in the path of Christ to help the sick and suffering.

Some may find it hard to respond but God will continue to give in the hope that eventually that gift will be acknowledged and lives will be changed.

Be aware, in asking for God's blessing, God's gift, you may indeed receive it – and then how will you respond?

Will you turn your life around? Millions of people have.

Or will you ignore and reject? Millions of people have.

Amen.