

Day of Pentecost John 15:26-27; 16:4b-15

Here is a retelling the story of the coming of the Holy Spirit to the disciples in a way that encourages us to imagine we are there. Try for a few moments to inhabit the story – try to be a bystander in Jerusalem nearly 2000 years ago. It was the day of Pentecost. It was the time of the year when all good Jews would take part in a glorious time of celebration. Pentecost had been in existence for centuries and was a time when all Jews would come before God making their offerings of Thanksgiving for the harvest of the year. As the term Pente-cost might suggest, this celebration came to a climax fifty days after the Passover. People from all over the known world would journey to Jerusalem to take part in this great celebration.

Let us allow ourselves to become a part of the festivities. About us we can see children running up and down the street playing and shouting as they go along. A couple of boys are cutting in and out of the crowd as they play tag. Merchants are lining the streets, trying to peddle their goods. We can hear them call, "Get your lambs; buy your bullocks for the great sacrifice of thanksgiving. Get your fresh vegetables, fruits and grains at a good price." Jerusalem is a busy place to be, some know their way around for others this is their 1st pilgrimage and they are amazed by the city. Perhaps what is most amazing is to hear all the different languages of the people who have travelled many miles to make their sacrifices.

Down at the Temple long queues of people are waiting to offer their gifts to God. Off to the side we see an old man with a long gray beard, and a scroll in hand. He is telling the story of how Moses went up into the mountain to receive the Ten Commandments on the Day of Pentecost many centuries prior. Then we hear the reading of the Law: Thou shalt not kill; thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour; and the list goes on.

As all these exciting events are taking place we wonder how anyone could miss out on a happening such as this. It is then that we recall that not everyone is celebrating. Down the street, a short distance, a small group of Christians have gathered in an upper room. They are waiting as Jesus had commanded them, there is something unique about this group. It had been ten days since Jesus had ascended into heaven. Jesus had told them to go to Jerusalem and wait for the Holy Spirit to come. For those ten days they spent their time in prayer. Can you imagine spending ten straight days in doing nothing but praying? Some of those gathered had been with Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane and could not remain awake a few hours. Jesus had to continually awaken them. Yet this group was uniquely assembled in prayer. They wanted so much to be at one with Jesus, that they were willing to spend the time in continuous prayer.

Then we find that this group was unique in that scripture says they were all assembled in one place in unity. Can you imagine what it would be like to come to church one Sunday and discover that every church member was present? This says something powerful about this group. These words go beyond just faithful church attendance. It demonstrates that these people needed each other. They needed the love and support that the other believers could give.

What was the basis of their harmony? They were different in many ways. What enabled them to lay aside their differences and become one? They loved Jesus, they wanted to keep his final command to them to stay together and wait. They loved each other, they had spent many months and years on an epic journey together with an amazing teacher and mentor who has just turned out to have been proved to be the messiah they had hoped he would be, that sort of experience brings people together. They were willing to give everything they had for the gospel because they knew now that they were justified in their faith. They longed to see Jesus again. They simply shared a deep desire to be with their teacher and their friend.

Outside that small upper room, life went on as usual. But inside, something beautiful took place. Unknown to the rest of the world an event was about to occur that would change the course of history. There was suddenly a sound like the blowing of a wind filled the whole house. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them as they began to speak in other languages. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit. Here we find out truly what exciting effects the Holy Spirit had on their lives. Some of them began to speak in other languages but something more important happened. Their lives were changed forever. When the Holy Spirit came upon them, they received a power that could come only from God.

Peter is a perfect example of what can happen to a person yields their life to the Holy Spirit. Peter, the hot-headed disciple who offers hope to all Christians who feel they sometimes get it wrong. It was Peter who was always losing his temper. But when the Holy Spirit came upon Peter, this person who was once afraid and followed Jesus at a distance denying that he knew him, took the lead and went out of the small room with courage and boldly preached Jesus' story, dead, buried, resurrected and coming again. His life was changed forever because of the power of the Holy Spirit.

We sometimes forget that Peter was not alone on the day of Pentecost. The Holy Spirit is for all believers. On the day of Pentecost, 119 other disciples' lives were changed. They gained strength and began to witness, many of them in other languages. So often we are almost afraid of the Holy Spirit, when we think of the spirit we call to mind dramatic happenings. The Holy Spirit is sometimes the most difficult person of the trinity for us because this sort of thing is just not very Anglican. But instead of being afraid of looking like a fool under the influence of the Holy Spirit we need to give ourselves over and allow ourselves to be used by God like those first disciples did. We can be moved by the spirit in all manner of ways if we will just allow it. We probably feel the prompting of the spirit in our lives through prayer and worship but without the drama we don't always recognise it. Perhaps even hearing this scripture reading again had moved you in some way. That just might be the Holy Spirit, God can work in the quiet of our hearts as effectively as God works through astonishing miracles all we have to do is recognise his promptings and respond to them therefore allowing ourselves, like Peter, to be utterly changed.