

Sermon Pentecost - May 24th 2015

I remember my grandmother had a very old and quite large black and white television which was in a cabinet that had doors on the front that you could pull closed when you had finished watching your TV favourites. She was quite a fan of snooker and I can remember her watching snooker on her black and white TV. As I think about it now it seems quite a strange thing to do because all the balls looked the same, apart from the white one. The commentator would say, 'And now he's going for the green ball' and you had no idea which one that was so he would say, 'top right hand corner of the table'. It was entertaining but now I can't imagine watching it, and as for looking at nature programmes where would we be without colour! Without colour some programmes were harder, if not impossible to really understand, and most were a lot harder to appreciate!

On the day of Pentecost, the birthday of the church, it is as if we move from black and white to full blown technicolour. It is as if everything becomes alive and everything becomes clearer to the first disciples - the 120 in that upper room. Jesus had promised them in our Gospel reading this gift of the Holy Spirit, he had told them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait there for the promise of the Father. The Holy Spirit was going to give them life and power, and as the Spirit of Truth, would bring revelation and understanding to them of all Jesus had said and done. Their world was about to change, and after that, they were about to change the world - beginning in Jerusalem.

I love this account in the book of Acts because it all starts so normally and in some ways predictably. The Feast of Pentecost was the Jewish Harvest Festival and gathering together in Jerusalem was something very familiar to all the disciples gathered on that day. It was just like coming here on a Sunday at 9.30 settling into your usual seat and nestling back .. when suddenly all heaven breaks loose - so what can we learn about the Holy Spirit from this incredible event? To try and aid our memories there are three L's to remember about the Spirit's ministry.

Firstly, the Spirit brings **life** - the whole description is one full of examples of an abundance of life - the sudden arrival of the Spirit bursting onto the scene, the sound 'like the rush of a violent wind', the 'filling of the entire house' where they were sitting, tongues of fire - it all speaks of life and action that brings change and transformation. This is the ministry of the Spirit - in Genesis chapter one the Spirit is described as hovering over the waters - hovering over a dark and chaotic scene waiting for the Father to speak through the Son the word that brings life through the Spirit's action. There are well documented accounts throughout Church history of more recent outpourings of the Holy Spirit and all have the same description of a sense of new life, new vision and creativity as the Holy Spirit comes afresh to the Church. And just as in Genesis, the Holy Spirit wants to transform and bring change to the dark and sometimes chaotic places in our lives. The places that we find unmanageable and sometimes too frightening to face alone. Such places when yielded to the Holy Spirit in prayer can be brought from death to newness of life.

Secondly, the Spirit brings **light**. In our Gospel today Jesus says of the Spirit, 'he will glorify me, because he will take of what is mine and declare it to you'. It is only as the Holy Spirit brings revelation of Jesus to us, that somehow we can see more clearly and understand more deeply who the Lord Jesus is and all that He has done for us - we could say that the Holy Spirit literally opens our eyes.

Peter speaking to the crowds quotes the prophet Joel - through the ministry of the Spirit he says, 'your sons and daughters will prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams.' The Holy Spirit he says will work across all ages and across gender boundaries - which for these Jewish hearers was a revolutionary statement. But most importantly the Spirit will bring **fresh** revelation - whether it is prophecy, vision or dreams the Holy Spirit brings a word from God that is a 'now' word. Any word claiming to be inspired by the Holy Spirit must always be in line with God's revealed word in the Scriptures. By a 'now word I mean a word, often from the Bible, that speaks to us right here, right now in our current circumstances. It may be in a sermon or through something we have read or heard but it is a word that bring release, that brings life, that sometimes unlocks a situation that seems previously impossible to change or understand.

When the Apostle Paul describes the gift of prophecy in 1 Corinthians 14 it has nothing to do with predicting future events. He says prophetic words bring exhortation, edification and comfort to people. In other words they are words that stir up, build up or cheer up. Put that way how often have you felt prompted to encourage someone, to build them up or to write a note to cheer someone up. When we obey these promptings of the Holy Spirit our words bring life and strength to others. But we also need visions and dreams - the Church right now needs this prophetic gift of the Spirit we do not need more strategies or more new ideas - it may be time to wait on God, to stop our frenetic activity, to draw aside as the disciples did in that upper room and wait for the Holy Spirit to speak afresh to us. To listen for that word that brings life and sheds new light on what we face today in our generation. God's strategy and God's ideas for God's church.

And thirdly, the Spirit brings **love**. The Apostle Paul can state that the love of God has been shed abroad in our hearts **by the Holy Spirit** given to us.' It is important to note that although this is a corporate event - the birth of the church - as all are filled with the same Spirit at the same time. It is a personal event too. 'A tongue (of fire) rested on each of them'. It was a personal encounter with the living God. The Holy Spirit will always lead us into a deeper knowledge of God's love for us. He will convict us of sin not to condemn us for it but in order that we can be free and forgiven people through all that Jesus has done. And that love is not just for us it overflows to all the world just as it does in this Acts account. As they speak in other tongues as the Spirit enables them it is not for them it is for the crowds of visitors and pilgrims to Jerusalem. Each foreign listener got a personal message from God through the disciples as they overflowed with the life and love and power of the Holy Spirit. Barriers of race, gender and status come down, divisions are healed, oppressive structures are dismantled as the Spirit comes.

How we need today, right now this vital ministry of the Holy Spirit - Come Holy Spirit bring more of your life, your light and your love to us. Amen.