

Sermon for Sunday 19 May 2024

Acts 2: 1 – 21; Romans 8: 22 – 27; John 15: 26 – 27; 16: 4b – 15

Pentecost

There are many things – big and small, that we dread in anticipation, aren't there? Perhaps making a speech at a family wedding, downsizing and moving to a smaller, more convenient home? starting a new school or a new job? Imagine then the dread and fear of the disciples when their beloved teacher and Lord tells them that after three years, he is going to leave them.

How could they possibly imagine all that was going to happen in between the quiet conversation recorded in our Gospel reading from John, and the Day of Pentecost as we heard it from Acts. They feel sad because Jesus has said he is going to leave them, and they really don't want to hear this.

The word used for the Holy Spirit in our Gospel is 'parakletos'. Our Bibles translate this as 'Advocate' (John 15: 26) – and mine has a footnote suggesting 'Helper' as an alternative. Another is 'Comforter'. The 'para' part of the

Greek word suggests someone who works alongside as in paramedic or paralegal for example. This is what an advocate does too. They may be a lawyer - a professional pleader speaking to defend someone in a court of law. Or they may be someone who goes with a person to a difficult interview. An advocate is someone who is on our side and is able to speak for us, perhaps from a position of greater power or authority than we have. Someone who makes their strength available to us. The Holy Spirit may literally give us the words to say – as happens to Peter as he speaks in our reading from Acts.

Jesus also calls the Holy Spirit the Spirit of Truth (John 15: 26). Remember, Jesus called Himself the Way, the Truth and the Life. Jesus promises "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." What Jesus means is not that His disciples will have some abstract understanding of Truth with a capital 'T', but that they will be drawn into a relationship with Him, they will know Him in a deep way. We don't know why – but it is only

when Jesus leaves the disciples that His Spirit will be available to them in this way and this kind of knowing will be possible. It's the Holy Spirit who makes it possible for all of us to know Jesus. And because Jesus and His Father are one, the Spirit also unites us with God the Father. And the Holy Spirit glorifies Jesus, as He is known and worshipped by His followers.

Jesus also says the Holy Spirit will be active in the world, proving that the world's view of Jesus as mad and dangerous which led to his condemnation and crucifixion is wrong. The work of the Holy Spirit is to point out the consequences of how we respond to Jesus. Those who convicted Him are now shown to be deluded sinners. The Holy Spirit is coming to prove that Jesus is the one who knows the truth, because Jesus' judgements are the same as God's.

In these words, and more Jesus tries to reassure His disciples that all will be well when He has left them.

And then comes the Day of Pentecost

Luke, the writer of Acts uses metaphors of 'wind' and 'fire' in his attempt to describe the arrival of

the Holy Spirit. What do they suggest? Wind is often completely unpredictable; it comes and goes, is not biddable or controllable. Fire suggests both safety and danger; warmth, light, protection, but the possibility of destruction too. Both are mysterious and powerful. Both can be devastating. Think of the pictures we've seen all too often recently of the aftermath of a forest fire or a tornado. Everything swept away, flattened, and the landscape transformed. The only possibility is a whole new beginning.

The arrival of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost is both a new landscape and a new beginning. As Peter quotes from the prophet Joel, God promises:

"I will pour out my spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions" (Acts 2:17/Joel 2: 28).

And Peter's spirit-inspired and very bold message is one of judgement. The Spirit speaks the truth about Jesus, quite possibly to some of those very same people who had shouted in the crowd for Him to be crucified. The Spirit is being released into the world in and through the Apostles. From

these twelve the message will reach to the ends of the earth. Even to us!

So today as we celebrate the coming of the Holy Spirit, let us ask God to fill us more and more with His Spirit, the Advocate, the Helper, the Spirit of Truth, who leads us into the truth and unites us with Jesus. The spirit who gives us the power, both individually and together, as a church, to follow him, to speak the truth about Jesus to the world.

“Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on us,
Break us, melt us, mould us, fill us.
Spirit of the living God fall afresh on us.”

Amen

Revd Diana Young