

Today is a day of double celebration. As a country we are celebrating the Queen's Platinum Jubilee in honour of a woman who has faithfully devoted her life to service, for 70 years as our monarch and for virtually her whole life to God, and she is not ashamed to proclaim the good news of the Gospel in her annual Christmas message. It's not an exaggeration to call her our Servant Queen.

The other celebration today is of course to mark the effective birthday of the Church as result of the Holy Spirit dramatically descending on the followers of Jesus gathered together, enabling them to speak in languages they didn't know so that it was easy for their listeners, who came from a whole range of countries, to understand the Good News being proclaimed by the disciples. It was so effective that 3,000 people were baptised that very day.

But while we might understand, and hopefully personally experience, what the Holy Spirit does, it's much harder to actually describe the Holy Spirit. Our language isn't up to the job. Words fail us. Luke says ... And suddenly from heaven came a sound LIKE the rush of a violent wind. And he goes on Divided tongues, AS OF fire...In his description of Jesus' baptism, Luke the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form LIKE a dove.

And even Jesus can't give us an exact description. In his exchange with Nicodemus, Jesus says the wind blows where it wants to and you hear the sound of the wind but you don't know where it has come from or where it's going. That's what the Holy Spirit is LIKE, he tells Nicodemus. So not wind, not fire, not a dove, but like each of them. In our Gospel reading, Jesus describes the Holy Spirit not only as the spirit of truth, but also as our helper as in being our comforter and our advocate and our teacher, Jesus says. So forgive me if I don't try to give an all-encompassing definition of the Holy Spirit, because I just don't have the words to do so except to say that the Holy Spirit is clearly multi, multi-faceted.

What I do know is that Jesus promised to send his Spirit to live in all those who asked for it – and indeed we can see that in the life of the Queen. A few of us were here several years ago at Pentecost when Tony Bramley, our former much loved non-stipendiary, preached a wonderful sermon about how a fictional nervous SEC vestry returned the gift of the Holy Spirit unopened because it all sounded too inconvenient and too dangerous and generally too much like hard work. And we all know the havoc the wind can cause when we leave an outside

door or a window wide open and paper blows all over the place and internal doors slam shut. But sometimes God needs to do that to grab our attention.

And that's the thing, God can and will act dramatically if he needs to. And some would say he needs to right now. For the past two years we have been a bit like the disciples, huddled together for fear of what is going on around us. And just as the pandemic receded from being life-threatening to something of a nuisance for most people, the world is seeing its biggest war since Korea or perhaps the Iran-Iraq conflict, yet because it's closer to home to us in Europe the threat feels more existential. So, like the disciples we desperately want Jesus to say Peace be with you and receive the Holy Spirit.

Pentecost was one of the great Jewish feast days, celebrating the spring harvest and the revelation of the law to Moses. The Greek word Pentekostos means 50th and Luke tells us this outpouring of the Spirit occurred 50 days after the resurrection.

And amazing as the imagery Luke uses is, the real point is that the Holy Spirit showed up, and not only showed up but transformed the lives of Jesus's followers, turning frightened, semi-literate fishermen into the Body of Christ, and giving them the confidence to share the good news to the extent that they persuaded 3,000 people to give their lives to Jesus that same day. Pentecost is about God disrupting our normal way of doing things, of freeing us from our normal suspicious, tribal ways into a radical loving of our neighbours.

A lot is said about speaking in tongues, not all of it complimentary. Indeed, the scoffers thought it was a sign that Jesus' followers were all drunk at 9 o'clock in the morning. But for many people, praying in tongues that they don't understand is not meant for other people's benefit, but rather is a way of worshipping God in the knowledge that their own language is insufficient.

But Luke is talking about something very different. What Luke is talking about is the disciples talking in languages that were totally familiar to their listeners, even if not to themselves. This is the very opposite of the story in our Genesis reading where the introduction of different languages divided people and drove them apart.

That's the very opposite of what Luke portrays here, where the use of multiple languages draws people together rather than splitting them up. God birthed the

church out of great difference, and in the face of that difference God make people engage, a lesson that, sadly, many Christians have yet to learn as they remain entrenched in the silos of their own rightness.

Luke talks about disciples speaking in the mother tongue of 15 or so different groups of people who were all able to understand them perfectly.

Luke tells us that the onlookers were astonished and perplexed. It clearly wasn't the message that confused them, more the fact that God was choosing to speak to them in their own language with all the implications surrounding that. God was speaking across all sorts of barriers, race, gender, ethnicity, religion, culture, you name it, precisely because God wanted them to know that God is the God for everyone and for them in particular. This Spirit-drenched place is for you, come on in was the underlying message. A message every individual church, let alone the Church universal, needs to reinforce week in, week out.

Extraordinary stuff. But it still happens today.

One of my favourite stories involves our old church in London, Holy Trinity Brompton. At one service they were worshipping in tongues and it became apparent that one woman's voice was soaring above the others to the point where everyone else stopped singing. After the service an Iranian member of the congregation went up to one of the clergy and asked who is this Prince of Peace that the singer was referring to. It turned out not only that the woman had been singing in Farsi, or Persian, but that she didn't know a word of Farsi. But God had used her to bring that particular person into a relationship with Jesus.

So the Holy Spirit is still at work today, both dramatically and also in quieter and subtler ways. Now, we're not going to see anything as dramatic in West Linton as what happened at Pentecost, apart from anything else the numbers don't stack up. There would have been hundreds of thousands of people in Jerusalem to celebrate the feast.

But that doesn't mean that the Holy Spirit isn't at work in the village, or in Carlups or Romanno Bridge or Biggar or Peebles. Far from it, the Holy Spirit is always at work, and, importantly, according to each individual's nature and abilities.

I would like us to pause for a moment and think of instances where we have been aware of the Holy Spirit being actively present in our own lives. And if we can't think of any then now would be a good time to pray to be filled with an experience of the Holy Spirit, an experience that will sustain us through the dark soul of the night, an experience that will give us hope when everything in our lives seems turned upside down.

So let's be silent for a few moments, and if anyone would like to share their experience of their awareness of the Holy Spirit at work in their lives that would be great. And if you don't want to then that's fine too.

In conclusion I want to return to what I was saying a few moments ago – that Pentecost as Luke describes is for us all, especially for those who feel they have been battered by life for a whole variety of reasons, for those who feel unworthy, for those who feel God isn't interested in them.

This Spirit-drenched place is for you, come on in