

Year A Feast of Pentecost 24<sup>th</sup> May 2026

Acts 2:1-21. Corinthians 12: 3b-13. John 20: 19-23

God's love is given to us by giving us the Holy Spirit – which we read about this morning. This event was and is a critical event in the history of salvation and was the fulfilment of the promises of God related in Isaiah (32:15) and Joel (2:28-32), indicating that a new age had dawned and that the kingdom of God had dawned.

In the Book of Acts we heard about the Holy Spirit coming from heaven. No one could describe it properly. It came down with a noise just *like* rushing wind. If you have ever been outside in stormy windy weather you will know just how loud that can be. And sometimes those noises make us feel frightened. Sometimes those noises get us all excited and fill us with energy. This wind was the Spirit of God, the divine presence and power, and it certainly filled the disciples with divine power.

The place<sup>1</sup> the disciples and the other followers of Jesus – about 120 of them – was in, was filled with this noise. And as if that wasn't enough, the writer tells us that those gathered saw divided tongues *as of fire* appear among them and a tongue rested on each of them. We know this is a further symbolic description of the God's Spirit<sup>2</sup> - just go back and read of some of Moses encounters with God to check this out. Fire was symbolic of purification, so this act purified all those it settled on. After the sound like rushing wind and the divided tongues as of fire, each of the disciples was filled with the power of the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit had been promised to them by Jesus. He told them he would send the Holy Spirit to them, to help and guide them, to fill them right up with God's energy and all sorts of other gifts they might need.

A large crowd gathered outside where they were staying – attracted by the noise. The crowd was large because the Festival of Pentecost drew in lots of

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<sup>1</sup> In verse 2 it is described as a house, but given the size of the group that had gathered, it may have been a courtyard of a house.

<sup>2</sup> Exodus 3:2, 19:18, Ezekiel 1:13

visitors to Jerusalem from other countries, who all spoke different languages.<sup>3</sup> The funny thing was, that each person could hear the disciples speaking as if in their own language, even though the disciples didn't know anything other than their own language. The Holy Spirit's first gift to the disciples was to be able to be understood by people from all nations; they could all receive the message of the Good News of Jesus Christ. There were enough people upon whom the power of the Spirit had landed, for each to speak a different language and be understood by the people from all the nations listed. To me this is not a description of glossolalia – ecstatic speaking in tongues that requires interpretation – but an even more remarkable gift of speaking a language that others could understand without any interpretation, without the speaker having any knowledge of that language.

The crowd couldn't really work out what was happening. How could these men be speaking in languages? How could each person in the crowd, from so many different countries, each with their own language, understand what was being said? I am sure our reaction would have been the same.

Peter, the leader of the disciples stood up, or perhaps more accurately, stepped forward, out of the group of the apostles and 120 other baptised, and spoke to the crowd, and they could all understand him. He told them that God had given the disciples the gift of the Holy Spirit and it would be given to all who wanted it, no matter who you were or where you came from, no matter if you were young or old, a rich person or an unpaid slave. Peter was very clear that the prophecy from Joel<sup>4</sup> was now taking place. The Holy Spirit would be poured out on all people and would precede the 'great and glorious day of the Lord.' Peter was announcing that this Feast of Pentecost was *that* day.

There was a large crowd listening to Peter speak, and many asked to be baptised, wanting to become followers of Jesus Christ. About three thousand people were baptised that day.

In Paul's letter to the people who lived in the Greek city of Corinth, he tried to describe the Holy Spirit and what she gives to us. Paul said there are varieties of gifts but the same Spirit.

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<sup>3</sup> Incidentally, the places are listed from east to west. Did you know that?

<sup>4</sup> Joel 2:28-32

Paul says that we have our own body, but it is made up of different bits. We have eyes so we can see, legs and feet so we can walk and run and jump; we have hands so we can hold and touch, ears so we can hear. They all are different but go to make up our body.

Each part is important and brings strength. It is the same way with church; young and old, rich and poor, people good at playing music, people good at singing, people good at baking and drawing, people good at helping children, people good at praying, and so on. The church would not work at all well if we were all the same. We need to have diversity; people who are not alike, who want to come together. Diversity gives us a strength, we can all share our unique gifts to contribute to the whole.

Our church, when we let the Holy Spirit in, will create unity out of each one of us totally unique and loved people. It is much better than OK that we are all different and work together to make the church. Let us celebrate today the Holy Spirit's ability to create unity out of our diversity, to fashion and mould us in to something for this time and this place.

How, I wonder is the Holy Spirit challenging us today; challenging our instincts of being comfortable around people the same as us and being uncomfortable around 'the other'? Do we see the gifts that others have, people we may not otherwise value? Do we see God's image in those who do not look like us, or sound like us? Do we value them for what they have to offer our church and our community? Is a challenge for each of us to look deeply in to our hearts and notice our own conscious biases and be prepared to admit we will also have unconscious biases that we can only bring in to our conscious minds by reflecting deeply on our thoughts and behaviours.

The Scots believe they are a tolerant nation, welcoming people from different backgrounds, and being more socially inclusive. And yet the national attitudes survey shows that our attitudes and outlook is similar to those of the other UK nations. In our recent election one in eight people of those who voted<sup>5</sup>, voted for Reform in this constituency. And in the regional vote, three Reform candidates were elected out of the seven seats available. I personally have great difficulty understanding how anyone who claims to follow the teachings

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<sup>5</sup> 55.2% turnout in this constituency

of Jesus can vote for a party that is divisive and seeks to denigrate certain groups in our population. A good friend of mine, wearing his dog-collar, invited people from the Unite the Kingdom rally last Saturday to have a conversation with him, to listen and better understand their point of view. I admire him for doing this, and showing God's love to those who were supporting what I consider to be antithetical to the teachings of Jesus. I have something to learn from my friend's approach.

Today, as we celebrate the coming of the Holy Spirit, I pray that the Holy Spirit may truly open our eyes and our hearts and our minds, that we may let the Holy Spirit search us, disturb and unsettle us, so we can truly value the whole of the diversity of God's people and God's creation. That when we look into someone else's eyes we see someone loved by God, and made in God's image.

Today, the feast of Pentecost, is quite rightly seen as the birthday of the Church. Let us all give thanks and sense afresh what the Holy Spirit may be asking of us, apart from celebrating Pentecost by eating cake.