

Sunday 31<sup>st</sup> May 2020

This week we celebrate Pentecost the birth of the Church. I think back to all the things we have been able to do to celebrate over the years. I have had balloons on chairs orange, red and white. It was the first year I had been in Dundee. I had no clue about the football rivalry in the city. Being a west coast girl. I thought I had been clever and tied balloons on to each chair and we would release them during the kids talk to have the picture of the spirit being free and moving in the Church. I looked around just before the service and my pattern of orange, yellow, white had been turned into a random mix of balloons, I asked the session clerk why and she said the Dundee fans won't sit on a chair with an orange balloon. A wee lesson in cultural sensitivity for me but it made me think of welcome and inclusion and that the Spirit moves in people and places that we have no control over.

So, as we celebrate Pentecost today, without Balloons or cakes or the other things we have used over the years. We come, all are welcome, and all come expecting to leave changed.

### Call to Worship

God of life!

As Jesus promised,

you sent your Spirit to enrich our lives. As we come to worship you today pour out your Spirit on us,

that we may give you all we have: receive our worship, we pray.

Reading Acts 2:1-21

In times like this we have a list of all the things we are going to celebrate when this crisis is over. I don't know about you but I'm missing going a long drive, my car only moves a day or two a week and I haven't used a full tank of diesel for months. I have a list of places I will go when it's safe to do so.

Today we celebrate the birth of the Church, and we find the disciples all together in the one place. In a house in Jerusalem as they had been instructed to wait in Jerusalem. They had seen Jesus leave the earth and must have wondered what would happen next... yet they waited and followed Jesus instructions. By this point they had been around Jesus enough to know that what he said would be the best thing for them. And they wait together.

And it was worth the wait...

It must have been exciting and scary at the same time. Sitting in the house and a violent wind blows through your house. Wind all around you and your friends as you are just sitting. They must have wondered what on earth was happening. Had the roof come off or some earthly explanation. Then they see what seemed to be tongues of fire and they rested on each one of them. Then they were filled with the Holy Spirit.

Were then told that people around them got a bit curious as to what was happening, like every person through history they needed to find out what was going on. A crowd formed and we are told they were bewildered by what they saw. Each one of them heard what was being said in their own language.

“Amazed and perplexed they asked one another “What does this mean?”

From that time to this we ask the same question for the Spirit enables and guides and goes wherever they want to go. The Spirit frees us and helps us to follow God in this world.

The birth of the Church the disciples touched by the Spirit to do the will of God in this world. Twelve people set to form a movement of God that continues to this day, all around the world. The Good news spread from one tiny nation all around the world.

So, we celebrate today that still we are the people of God on our time, That the Church through the ages has changed and grew and diminished but there are always people left to pass on faith and to be Church in their day.

And wrestle with the question “what does that mean to be the people of God in our day?”

The message remains the same, the way we communicate and the method of communication changes. Today we celebrate Pentecost online, in our own homes but connected by our shared faith and hope in God.

We hear Peter’s first sermon; I think back to mine and it certainly wasn’t like this:

***No, this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel:***

***17 “In the last days, God says,***

***I will pour out my Spirit on all people.***

***Your sons and daughters will prophesy,***

***your young men will see visions,***

***your old men will dream dreams.***

***18 Even on my servants, both men and women,***

***I will pour out my Spirit in those days,***

***and they will prophesy.***

***19 I will show wonders in the heavens above***

***and signs on the earth below,***

***blood and fire and billows of smoke.***

***20 The sun will be turned to darkness***

***and the moon to blood***

***before the coming of the great and glorious day of the Lord.***

***21 And everyone who calls***

***on the name of the Lord will be saved.*** <sup>[c]</sup>

This passage from the book of Joel is the first sermon that followers of Jesus would listen to in their first sermon. God would pour out his Spirit on all people, the crowd had just witnessed the events the disciples had just been through. They could understand in their own language and then of these men start to speak powerfully. The world of these folks had been changed in an instant and the power of the Spirit of God compelled them to tell other people. The Church grew and grew because of this one event in history.

Lots of things have happened in the history of the Church since then but we are still here today celebrating that time and being reminded that the same Spirit lives in our world today.

Nelson Mandela said this:

**“Vision without action is just a dream,  
action without vision just passes the time,  
and vision with action can change the world.”**

In Peter’s sermon he sets this out Sons and daughters will prophesy and the young will see visions and the older folks will dream dreams. The first sermon tells us that the Church will be a community of all people, filled with the Spirit and enabled to see what God is doing in the world around them and that all have a part to play in the community of God. A place for all to share gifts and skills and callings. For all those who joined the early Church community things would never be the same again.

Today for us as we celebrate Pentecost, and the Church again may never be the same again. We will need to think through where we go from lockdown. Even when we get the door open and can meet, it will not be like it was before.

But today we are encouraged because we again look to the ancient words of “what does this mean?”

To go back to Nelson Mandela, we can have all the vision and dreams and if we don’t see change and action hand in hand our dreams and visions will not change things. The Spirit lives to set us free has been sung and sung in our Churches, and here we are free to be the people God has called us to be and this Pentecost in these changing times for us, we still have that same Spirit that came and changed the lives of the disciples and all those who chose to listen.

This week in my usual wanderings around the hills, I stopped at the ancient so the legend goes Roman stone wall at the drove road and sat and read my devotion for that day. As I opened the Bible passage for that day Psalm 23, I looked around and saw sheep and lambs and was struck by the familiar words I have read so frequently over the years

*“ The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing.  
2 He makes me lie down in green pastures,  
he leads me beside quiet waters,  
3 he refreshes my soul.”*

I lack nothing jumped out of the phone screen for me, we are found among the followers of Jesus, who go back to this first experience of God’s spirit and they were filled with that Spirit that they could do anything, even speak in public with such a powerful sermon for the first time. We look back to them and as an example for us in our time.

Where will our question what does this mean take us? Who will have visions and dream dreams and what will our legacy be to those who come after us.

God asks us to keep dreaming and turn the visions into action in our time and our place.

May the peace of the Lord Christ go with you,

Wherever He may send you  
May he guide you through the wilderness  
Protect you through the storm  
May he bring you home rejoicing  
At the wonders he has shown you

And the blessing of God Almighty  
Father, Son and Holy Spirit  
Be with you and remain with you  
Now and forever more  
Amen.