

PENTECOST: St George's Eastergate May 31st 2020.

I think many of us at the moment must feel that we are living in very confusing times. The UK government often seems to come out with such a variety of instructions that nobody is quite sure of what they are or are not supposed to do; this coupled with the fact that ministers themselves are at each other's throats much of the time. We can feel that on all sides we are surrounded by a lack of compassion in political discussion, by a lack of clarity in leadership and by an abundance of argument.

As it happens the Christian church throughout the world is celebrating today the pouring out of God's Spirit on His world. It is utterly appropriate therefore that we remind ourselves this morning that God's Spirit never brings us chaos. When the world was created God's Spirit brought order out of chaos, distinguishing one thing from another. God's Spirit is still poured out on God's world today to bring order out of chaos; to recreate that world. Tearfund have put this idea central to their thinking and in one of our housegroups we have been following their material centring on 'rebooting God's world' ..in other words 're energising it ..just as our computers need rebooting or reenergising from time to time, God's world needs to be re-energised and re created by God's Spirit.

Last week I said that we , God's people, should follow Florence Nightingale's advice and be alert to what God is doing in our world. When we look at the world of the first century we must surely be amazed at the extraordinary events described in the book of Acts. This is such an important chapter in the outworking of God's salvation history. We count the weeks from Easter to reach the date for Pentecost: the word Pentecost means 50th...the 50th

day after Passover. For the Jews it was called the 'feast of weeks', Shavuot, the day when faithful Jews celebrated the giving of the Law on mount Sinai. It is of course God's Law that brings order to the lives of human beings. That is why Jerusalem was crowded on that particular day and why so many different languages were being spoken..."every nation under heaven".

We have seen, haven't we, that over the last few weeks since the amazing but puzzling events of Easter, the followers of Jesus had been together praying...they had been driven to their knees. [This of course is why the Anglican church worldwide has been encouraging the 'thy Kingdom Come' initiative between Easter and Pentecost] and why I in the company of many of my colleagues have been encouraging a big prayer initiative. So just over 2000 years ago what was it that happened as a result of their prayer?

Bishop Michael Ramsey once said of this event "The effects of God's action through His Holy Spirit is mighty...it is describable in symbols alone" ...in the story Robin has just read to us what are the symbols that show us the effects of the Spirit...for of course the nature of God's Holy Spirit is such that it is not physically visible...just like God Himself. God is so great that he cannot easily be confined to an easy definition...but He can certainly be experienced!

'Suddenly from heaven there came the sound like the rush of a violent wind.' Do you remember the words of Jesus to Nicodemus, a religious leader who wanted to know more of God's actions in the world, he said "The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes . So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit." We can't see wind can we but we experience it as one of the most

powerful forces on the planet....something extraordinary happened to those ordinary followers of Jesus that day...they were not expecting it and it took them over!

We don't like things being out of control do we...but that is something we have all experienced during this pandemic...we have been more aware than ever before that we are not ultimately in control of our lives...God our maker is in control...let's join in with Him in the power of His Spirit!

There was another powerful symbol that day that illustrated the outpouring of God's Spirit...."tongues of fire resting upon each of them"...what does this image say?...it is fire that glows...it keeps the light of Jesus glowing in the hearts of those who are united with Him and it is by that light that we are able to see the world through the eyes of Jesus. Fire also gives warmth...the fire of the Holy Spirit can and does warm our hearts to both reassure us of His love and to enable us to love Him with warmth. But fire also burns...if we are to have this vision and warmth we will at times experience the pain of burning...the burning away of impurities...there is an element of risk associated with fire.

On that first Day of Pentecost God's Spirit took control utterly of those early believers. They found themselves energised to speak about God's deeds of power, each in their own way and language. They were understood by all and as a result "all who called on the name of the Lord were saved." That was the mission of the church then and it still is now! In one way the whole event must have felt chaotic and out of control BUT there was order and purpose within it.

Note that in our Gospel reading when Jesus stood among His disciples after the resurrection he breathed on them and

said” Peace be with you” and “Receive the Holy Spirit” and then...perhaps even more remarkably”If you forgive the sins of any they are forgiven and if you retain the sins of any they are retained.” ...in other words God’s work will now continue in the world through you in whom the Holy Spirit lives. This is quite an undertaking!

We must not trivialise Pentecost...The Holy Spirit does not influence by a gentle comforting nudge from time to time..there is risk involved in praying for God’s Holy Spirit to fill our lives; in being part of His re-creation; of God’s reenergising of His world and His rebooting of ABE!

Are we ready and prepared to be part of it?

AMEN.