

Acts 2.1-21
31st May 2020

The gift of an untidy Pentecost

Maybe it's hard for us to appreciate that the Christian Whit-Sunday has its origins in a Jewish Harvest Festival, yet that is actually what Pentecost was initially about. It's the Greek name for Shavuot, one of three Jewish pilgrim festivals and it's called Pentecost because it's fifty days since the last festival which was Passover.

Fifty days ago things were very different for Jesus and his followers. Fifty days ago, betrayal and denial were in the air. Fifty days ago, there was a cross and a tomb.

And in this intervening period the disciples have met with resurrection. The presence of Jesus has been manifested among them and slowly but surely there has been a growing confidence that the cross wasn't the end of the Jesus' story.

On the Day of Pentecost Jesus' followers (we are told there were 120 of them) re-grouped once more in Jerusalem. I wonder if it felt like coming out of lockdown. Maybe since Easter some of them had been going it alone, but now there was a glorious coming together in one place, on one day. For Luke this time of celebration in Jerusalem seems like a new beginning, an outpouring of the presence of God full of life and hope. The idea of Pentecost is born!

When we Christians talk of 'The Spirit' we're talking of God being at work in our world.

And in that sense the Spirit was around long before Pentecost, yet Luke seems to become especially aware of God's enabling and energy at this particular time in the story of the Church.

We might also observe on a day such as this just how untidy God can be! Perhaps that's very much the point that Luke is wanting to make.

Against a back drop of so much prescribed liturgy and tradition here in Acts Luke describes the presence of God as being much more outside the box. It's almost as if God is exploding with life, colour, energy and light. The dynamic of the Day of Pentecost isn't so much a quiet service of Evensong in some quaint cathedral (just the sort of worship I love, by the way!), it's more reminiscent of the Arsenal crowd celebrating with exuberance after winning the FA Cup.

It's chaos out there, and God's in the chaos, perhaps even revelling in the creativity and dynamism it can bring.

Part of the glorious confusion that day was the outpouring of praise in different languages. I enjoyed hearing Hauke pray in German this morning, and I so valued hearing Jochen speak the language of love and

Hauke's grandma charming us all with the international language of music.

Michael read to us from Acts earlier, an account of this pilgrim crowd hearing the message of God's love in their own tongue.

Some think of it as Babel being put back together again. In place of confusion this is a message that can make us one and give us a common language of goodness, kindness, love and justice.

So what is the symbolism of Pentecost? Isn't it about inclusivity? God's Spirit, God's life, God's love is open to all, can be experienced by all, understood and made personal to all.

God doesn't just speak ubiquitous English – he also communicates in the Bung language of Cameroon, now almost extinct with only three speakers left.

The point is surely this – God is not only present in my world, my language, my culture, or even my spirituality – by the Spirit God is also present in the 'other'. I can never lock God down because he continuously breaks out of the box. God works in the chaos of our world. God isn't afraid of untidiness.

We were talking this week at the Team Meeting of all the different services we can now access via the web

during this season of lockdown.

As the virus began, I was about to start a Sabbatical programme of visiting one church a month, for a year, just to see how other congregations did things differently. Well, I suppose I've done that in a way I least expected, from my desk in the Manse study, as I have tuned in to various services each week and, momentarily been part of their on-line congregation – and it's been quite an education.

These webcasts, podcasts and Zoom services have all been so different – you might even say its chaos out there in the church world! Well, maybe that's OK! God seems to speak to folk in many different styles and cultures. We give thanks for ours without decrying someone else's.

What's important is that behind the genre of music offered or the hand gestures employed there is the Fruit of The Spirit, expressed in love, joy and peace.

When a group of us visited Hauke and his family in Upper Saxony back in 2018 we called in at their church one morning and the Custos, the church caretaker, opened up and took us round. He was an elderly gentleman with a warm smile who has spent decades serving that community with great faithfulness. We could only exchange a few words together but somehow the language of love got through. He said to Jochen as we left how good it was to welcome this little group from

England into their church. It felt as if we were family, speaking a common language of love.

That's what we are celebrating today – seeing God in each other and rejoicing that God is at work all over the world breathing love and light into the chaos of life and filling it with goodness, meaning and hope.

In the untidiness of Pentecost 2020 *Thanks be to God* for the work of The Holy Spirit. Amen

Ian Green, Amersham, 27th May 2020