

Pentecost. Acts 2:1-21

When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. ² Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. ³ They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. ⁴ All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues^[a] as the Spirit enabled them.

⁵ Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven. ⁶ When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard their own language being spoken. ⁷ Utterly amazed, they asked: "Aren't all these who are speaking Galileans? ⁸ Then how is it that each of us hears them in our native language? ⁹ Parthians, Medes and Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia,^[a] ¹⁰ Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene; visitors from Rome ¹¹ (both Jews and converts to Judaism); Cretans and Arabs—we hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!" ¹² Amazed and perplexed, they asked one another, "What does this mean?"

¹³ Some, however, made fun of them and said, "They have had too much wine."

Peter Addresses the Crowd

¹⁴ Then Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice and addressed the crowd: "Fellow Jews and all of you who live in Jerusalem, let me explain this to you; listen carefully to what I say. ¹⁵ These people are not drunk, as you suppose. It's only nine in the morning! ¹⁶ 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.'^[a]

I don't know about you, but I've often thought that the Holy Spirit is the least well known, least well understood person of the Holy Trinity. Why should that be?

Perhaps because the Spirit is referred to less in the Bible than the Father and Son. From creation to Revelation, we are conscious of the **Father's** presence as creator, law giver, Father. The New Testament is centred on the life and teaching of **Jesus**, and the new covenant we receive through him. The **Spirit** is spoken of throughout the Bible, and directly given at Pentecost, but even then lacks the tangibility of Jesus, and the objectiveness of the Father. We find the Spirit hard to get to know.

A second reason is perhaps that we are confused by the nature of the Spirit? Perhaps where we are happy to attribute personhood to the Father and Son we are confused about the personhood of the Spirit. Do we know the Spirit? I find myself lacking confidence to speak of knowing the Spirit, where I don't have such trouble talking about Father and Son.

And perhaps our confusion about the Spirit is because the Spirit occasionally gives us mixed messages. If you will forgive me for an irreverent analogy the Spirit can at times be like the wallflower at a party, sitting at the edge, watching quietly, whom we must deliberately go over to to make acquaintance. The Spirit does not foist himself, or herself upon us... usually.

And then, just as we think that this is the Spirit's nature — quiet wisdom and goodness — then suddenly it is as if the quiet party wallflower has been drinking and gets on the dance floor, and we're *all* aware! Quiet wisdom has become boldness, courage, extraversion — even craziness!

This ambiguity may make some of us profoundly uncomfortable. And to illustrate this, perhaps imagine yourself as one of those disciples who had gathered on that Pentecost morning. You have been singing and praising God, you know that your Lord and saviour lives, and then the Holy Spirit comes with tongues of fire, and there you are, speaking a foreign language, liberated from all the inhibition, decorum and modesty that you are used to, and proclaiming God — and being understood!

For some of us we may feel deep discomfort: at the outrageous power of God, at the limelight that falls on us, at the out-of-our-depthness of our situation, at the power of God meeting with *us*. Others of us may hear this story and absolutely relish the excitement of the moment — the power of God speaking into the lives of a genuinely multinational crowd, and our having the privilege of being fully a part of this.

I think it is no wonder that some of the crowd mocked the disciples for being drunk. In our normal human experience it is only really drunkenness, or participating in a large group event like a flashmob that would induce behaviour quite like that of the disciples... and most of us don't get drunk or get involved in flashmobs!

All that being said, Pentecost reminds us that the Holy Spirit is our friend and helper and there for our benefit and for those around us.

The Spirit gives us unity in God — we can all be different and find our place in unity through the Spirit, with the same purpose.

The Spirit gives us transformation — in this baptism of the Spirit God cleanses us of our broken, reactive habits and transforms us freely into free people: empowered, sanctified and hopeful.

The Spirit gives us the boldness to love — daring to reach out to those who are not exactly of our language or culture — to love and to speak of God's love, fearlessly.

The Spirit equips us with gifts and nurtures fruit in us — we are more than we began with, because God is at work in us. I have known people who have received some of the bolder gifts of the Spirit — healing, prophecy, tongues. But others receive the quieter gifts — teaching, wisdom, prayerfulness, discernment, encouragement. None is greater or lesser according to the gift they have received, but it does matter that having received these gifts we know that they are to be used with confidence and in service, because they are gifts from God.

Just as significant is the fruit of the Spirit — love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness gentleness, faithfulness and self-control. I used to think that the fruit were like the gifts — you receive one fruit, I another. But the fruit all grows all together: as we are nurtured by God, we all grow more loving, more joyful, more peaceful, more patient and so on. At times we may feel our love drying up, or our patience wearing thin. Time to pray again, to be open to God again, to receive the Spirit again.

How do you know the Spirit? Do you quietly chat with the wise wallflower, who observes and loves from the corner of the party? Or when the Spirit dances, do you get on the floor and dance too? Better still, do you yearn to do both?

The Spirit of Pentecost has not left us — the Spirit still leads the dance, still surprises, still emboldens, still loves beyond telling, still empowers in surprising ways. Be encouraged! The Spirit affirms God's love to you! Be emboldened — in the Spirit's strength you can be part of transformation you could only dream of. Be at peace — the true Spirit gives us that attention, patience and love that unites us — diverse as the Christian world may be — in the love of the one God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Amen.