

Sermon Pentecost Sunday 9 June 2019

Acts 2:1-21 John 14:12-21

It was the first day of the Jewish festival, Pentecost, and the disciples, along with countless others, were gathered together. So let's first take a look at just what this day of Pentecost is. Pentecost is one of the main Jewish festivals and people from near and far would converge on Jerusalem in order to celebrate it. The festival had two main significances. Firstly, it had an historical significance. It commemorated the giving of the Law to Moses on Mount Sinai. Secondly, it had an agricultural significance. It celebrated the beginning of the barley harvest. It was a public holiday and the law stipulated that no work should be done. *'On the first day of the Festival of the Harvest, when you present the first of your new grain to the Lord, you must call a holy assembly of the people. None of your regular work must be done on that day.'* Numbers 28:21. So that is why everyone was gathered together on this occasion.

What really happened at Pentecost we are not sure for certain except that the disciples had an experience of the power of the Holy Spirit flowing into them such as they had never experienced before. This was manifested in three ways – by a strong wind, tongues of fire which appeared above their heads, and speaking in tongues.

There is some uncertainty as to just what took place in terms of the speaking in tongues. Did they actually speak in languages foreign to them? Who knows. So many different languages were being spoken that it is hard to say. I would like to make two points here.

Firstly, in the sixties and seventies a charismatic movement swept through Christianity. A feature of this movement is a strong focus on the Holy Spirit and the speaking in tongues was very much part of their worship. I read the biography of Derek Prince, a leader in this movement and someone who impacted on the lives of thousands of people through his ministry. Frequently you read of Derek Prince, worship leaders and congregations themselves speaking in tongues as they invoke the power of the Holy Spirit. Interestingly, the power of the Holy Spirit was often manifested in some amazing healing.

The second point I want to make is that I believe what happened at Pentecost is a pointer for the future of our church. What do I mean by that? Without going into a long and detailed explanation, if we are to grow as a church, I really do believe that we have to reach across cultural boundaries; we have to become more inclusive than we are at present. I made this very point in my Vision for our church. The fact that a variety of languages were being spoken on that occasion meant that a variety of cultures were represented. A language is an expression of a culture; it is even the heart of a culture.

So here we have all these cultures gathered together. The disciples and their fellow believers were then filled with God's Spirit, all together as one body. And guess what? This is the beginning of our church. Why is that? Because the disciples now had the power to go forth and spread the gospel. They had the power to teach, preach, heal and baptise people in Jesus's name. They had the power to set up communities of believers, communities which grew and grew, communities which grew into what now constitutes the world-wide Christian Church. And this all began with a gathering of a range of cultures.

What a powerful message that is for us. It is a message that I believe our church has to take on board. And when I say 'our church', I don't mean you, I mean the wider church. You already have taken it on board. I have said it before and I will say it again, what I love about this church, this congregation is both the friendly nature of the people and the multicultural nature of our congregation. I have heard that echoed more than once by people who have come to worship here.

On Wednesday I had a meeting with the bishop in order to discuss a few matters. He remarked to me how great it was when he was here last Sunday to see so many cultures represented in our congregation and observed that that was very rare in congregations around the Diocese. My friends, you are unique! You are a beacon for our church. You are just what a church should be like, and you reflect that gathering on the day of Pentecost when it all began.

I want to finish by using an analogy in order to help us understand just who and what the Holy Spirit is. I have here a loaf of bread. I am sure we all know the key ingredient that makes this loaf rise into its final shape – yeast. Without this ingredient it would be just flat. We can think of the Holy Spirit as being God's yeast. Thanks to the Holy Spirit the early church rose up. In response to the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, the early church got under way and in time took shape into what it is today. It wasn't easy and there were many challenges to meet and overcome. Without the Spirit, like the loaf without yeast, things would have continued to be flat and the church just would not have taken shape.

Two thousand years later, not only do we celebrate that beginning, that birth, but we also open ourselves to God's Spirit so he can touch and fill our lives. Jesus said, *'I am the bread of life.'* We pray that God's yeast, God's Spirit, will lift us up, will inspire us to greater things. Jesus Christ is the rock on which our church is founded. He is the body of our church and the

very character. We constitute the parts, every organ. We are rather like the ingredients of this bread. The Holy Spirit is the life force of our church; God's power working through his Word and through people to provide guidance, inspiration, healing, love, growth. The Holy Spirit is God's yeast.

Reverend Warner Wilder