

Sermon 5 June 2022 Pentecost Sunday

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 Mt 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 28:1. 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 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 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 a point here.

I believe what happened at Pentecost is a pointer for the future of our church. What do I mean by that? Last week, and on other occasions, I have made the point that I believe if we are to grow as a church, we have to reach across cultural boundaries; we have to become more inclusive. 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. And this is happening at what we consider to be the birth of our church!

So why do we consider this to be the beginning of our church? 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' 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 different cultures.

So where do we fit in with the Holy Spirit? How does the Holy Spirit relate to our lives? I would like to try and answer that with an anecdote, quite a well-known story about a mother who attended a concert given by the great Polish pianist, Paderewski. She took her five-year-old son with her.

They were seated very close to the stage. Before the concert got under way, the mother became engrossed in conversation with someone she knew, so she didn't notice that her son had slipped away. Eight o'clock came, the lights dimmed and the curtain opened. The

woman gasped in horror because there on the stage, seated at the grand piano, was her son. With one finger, he began playing 'Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star.' Before she could retrieve him, Paderewski walked onto the stage. Walking over to the piano, he whispered to the boy, 'Don't stop. Keep on playing.'

Then, leaning over the boy, Paderewski reached out with his left hand and began to play the bass part. He then reached around the other side of the boy and with his right hand, gave full body to the piece of music. Together, the great maestro and the small five-year-old boy mesmerized the audience. When they finished, the audience broke into thunderous applause. Years later almost all those present will have forgotten the pieces played by Paderewski that night but no one will have forgotten 'Twinkle Twinkle Little Star.'

What a wonderful image this is of the master (God/Christ) working through his Spirit with his disciples to create something special, our Church. The little boy represents Christ's disciples, and so therefore us as we inherit that charge. Initially, the disciples were rather like the little boy – their capability was somewhat limited, but just as the great maestro transformed the boy's playing into something beautiful and spectacular, so did the Holy Spirit transform the disciples, Christ's agents, who then had the power to create great things.

It is important that we open ourselves to God's Spirit so we can find the power, the capability to contribute to the God's work, and therefore the growth of our Church. We might feel inadequate. We might have doubts about our ability to make a difference. We might feel as though our gifts rank alongside those of the little boy, but in the hands of the master, we can make a difference. In a similar way, the Holy Spirit can take whatever we have, no matter how small, build upon it and transform it into something beautiful and meaningful.

We must have faith and we must commit ourselves to God, to God's work. He will ensure we have the competence and the power to make a difference, to create God's kingdom here on earth, and especially here in Flat Bush.

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