

Sermon Pentecost Sunday 2025

Acts 2:1-12 John 14:12-19

'On the day of Pentecost all believers were meeting together in one place.' Acts 2:1. 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 receiving of the Law by 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 through them as they had never experienced before. This was manifested in three ways – by a strong wind and tongues of fire: *'Suddenly, there was a sound from heaven like the roaring of a mighty windstorm, and it filled the house where they were sitting. Then what looked like flames or tongues of fire appeared and settled on each one of them.'* Acts 2:2.

Then there was the speaking in tongues: *'And everyone present was filled with the Holy Spirit and began speaking in other languages, as the Holy Spirit gave them this ability.'* Acts 2:4. 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 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 out across cultural barriers; we have to ensure we are inclusive. The fact that a variety of languages were being spoken on that occasion meant that a variety of cultures were being represented. A language is an expression of a culture; it is even the heart of a culture. And this was happening at what we consider to be the birth of our church!

I repeat what I said last week, we do have to be open to difference, we do have to embrace difference. Chief Rabbi Jonathan Sacks wrote, *'The test of faith is whether I can make room for difference. Can I recognise God in someone who is not my image? If I cannot, then I have made God in my image instead of allowing him to remake me in his.'*

So why do we consider this to be the beginning of our church? Because the disciples, being filled with the Holy Spirit, 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 mesmerised 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, the power to lay the foundation of our church.

It is important that we open ourselves to God's Spirit so we can find the power, the capability to contribute to 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.

Jesus made a promise, a commitment to make the Holy Spirit available to us, through his disciples. I quote from our Gospel reading, *'If you love me, obey my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, who will never leave you. He is the Holy Spirit, who leads into all truth.'* John 14:15-17.

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 slice of God's kingdom here on earth, and especially here in Flat Bush.