

Pentecost Sunday, 19 May 2024, Year B, Acts 2.1-21

Amazed and astonished, they asked, 'Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language?' Acts 2:7-8

Today, Pentecost Sunday, we are 50 days out from Easter Day. You can travel a long way in only 50 days and experience much in just 50 days. I have been to Canada for my brother's final lecture as a professor before his retirement, to Italy in the Footsteps of St Paul's on his last recorded journey and to a Hungarian village to visit a widowed elderly Anglican priest, a former chaplain of St Margaret's, Budapest. There have been baptisms and funerals, birthday celebrations and wakes, Sunday and weekday services, there has been a visiting choir from Yorkshire, there has been good news and bad, ...

Today, Pentecost Sunday, we celebrate 50 days out from Easter Day the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the disciples and their companions, our sisters and brothers in faith, with them we are witnesses to Christ's resurrection. On this day, the first Pentecost, they who are together in one place are driven onto the bustling streets of Jerusalem filled with the Holy Spirit to proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ 'speaking in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability/utterance.' Jesus too was driven out by the Holy Spirit into the wilderness.

The initial reaction of those who encounter these grace filled, these spirit filled followers of Jesus as presented in the Acts of the Apostles is "Amazed and astonished, they asked, 'Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language?'" At the 10.30am service we will hear those words read in Afrikaans, Arabic, German, Igbo, Italian, Sesotho, Shona, Sinhalese, Swahili, and Yoruba representing some of the first languages of our church family.

Those who hear their words spoken to them by the disciples and their companions have come to Jerusalem to keep Shavuot a thanksgiving festival for the first fruits of the wheat harvest. A festival later associated with a remembrance of the Law given by God to Moses on Mount Sinai. Yes we are to be law abiding, but first we are from now on to be a Spirit filled people. Many will have come from some distance away. For them it is not a day's outing, but a proper full blown undertaking. Some will have made their journey by ship and others by land and

many if not most a combination of the two. One can also imagine a caravan making its way from Arabia to Jerusalem.

Those who ask, “Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language’? Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabs...”

Of some interest given the recent Christ Church pilgrimage to Italy which included Rome is that amongst all these different Jews from across the Mediterranean world there were also proselytes from Rome indicating a large Jewish presence in Rome at the time. A proselyte is someone who has come over exchanging one set of beliefs, values or religion for another. And here it means more specifically a "convert to Judaism".

Today there are a few basic things I invite us to consider or reconsider. The first is based on the promise that Jesus makes to the disciples that he will not leave them comfortless. He, Jesus, keeps his promise by sending his Holy Spirit, the Advocate in his name on all gathered in the house to enliven them, to comfort them to strengthen them, and to embolden them.

“And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.”

It filled the entire house. It filled them all with the Holy Spirit. It is an outpouring and it is for all. There is the phenomenon of the mighty wind. There is the outward appearance divided tongues, but most importantly they and the house in which they are together is filled by the Holy Spirit. They are being permeated by the Holy Spirit. They are being soaked in the Holy Spirit. Our God, the God of our Lord Jesus Christ is a God of abundance. Not a miser. Not stingy. Not reluctant to give (impart gifts, sevenfold) but rather wanting to give/outpour generously. Think of abundant harvests. Think of one solitary wheat field and just how much wheat is harvested. One cannot help think of Jesus saying to the disciples, ‘The harvest is plentiful, but

the labourers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into his harvest.' (Matthew 9:37-38)

We like the disciples and their companions are also to be expectant and we do this by opening ourselves to God's Holy Spirit that we might be strengthened and comforted some 2000 years out from the first outpouring of the Holy Spirit. We should not deprive ourselves of this comforting, encouraging, strengthening, and emboldening, this life-giving gift of the Holy Spirit, by a wrongly circumscribed faith. A faith where boundaries have been too narrowly drawn that keep God out. A faith no longer willing and ready to be surprised by God, if it ever it was, as were the disciples and their companions on that first Pentecost day on which God poured out his Holy Spirit on all those who were together. Paul will write in his first letter to the Corinthians that we should desire the gifts of the Spirit writing, Pursue love and strive for the spiritual gifts. (1 Corinthians 14:1)

Why are so many reluctant to open themselves to God as made known and manifested in Jesus? Of whom or of what are they afraid? Of whom or what are we afraid? Are we afraid of offending contemporary social and ethical norms, of not belonging, of being ostracised, looking foolish in the eyes of the world, of having to change? Who has dominion in our lives, the world or God, in our relationships, in our homes, at work... How does Paul put it, "If for this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied." (1 Corinthians 15:19)

We have a hope for this world, but our hope for this world is supplemented by and now extended to what is yet to come, on the other side of the great divide that is death, in Christ comforted, encouraged, strengthened, and emboldened by God's Holy Spirit falling upon us, filling us and above all working within us.

We ought, need, must be open to being surprised by God. One can be certain that the disciples and their companions were being driven onto the streets of Jerusalem speaking in foreign tongues to people from afar about the things of God. Yes, Jesus promised to send the Advocate, the Holy Spirit the one who speaks on His behalf, and by which we abide in Christ, who has become our beginning and our end, who does not leave us comfortless.