

Pentecost Sunday
Acts 2:1-21 Romans 8:14-17 John 14:8-17

Intro

As someone who does like to be reasonably planned and be organised with at least the greater detail, if not the finer details, I love to see how God plans significant events.

Take for example the birth of Jesus... I can't mention the C word otherwise, according to Penny, a baby Reindeer dies ! :- (Jesus was born in Bethlehem because the census had been demanded meaning that Joseph and Mary had to travel there along with hundreds of other people

Then if we think of the death of Jesus - just celebrated at Easter - there were hundreds, probably thousands of people in Jerusalem, celebrating the Jewish feast of Passover

And today we are celebrating the first incredible outpouring of the Holy Spirit - the gift that Jesus promised to His disciples before He ascended in to heaven - and because 3000 people became devoted followers of Jesus that day, this day is thought of by many as the birthday of the church - Pentecost

Each of these very significant events within Christianity happened when there were MANY many people gathered in one place.... Maybe Jesus second coming will be over a Glastonbury weekend!

So why were there thousands of people gathered here in Jerusalem at the time.

Original Pentecost

Well, 2000 years ago, in Palestine there would be 2 harvests. One in May/June time and the other in the autumn and so 50 days (Pent meaning 5 hence 50 days - Pentecost) after the Passover festival (which we remember on the day before Good Friday) there was a Jewish holiday called Pentecost where all the adult Jewish men would come from wherever they lived to Jerusalem to attend the early harvest / Pentecost celebrations.

And so Jerusalem was filled with 1000's of pilgrims gathered from all over the place, each speaking their own dialects, to celebrate God's goodness and provision at harvest time.

Whilst all these people were celebrating the traditional festival, what were the close followers of Jesus doing? Were they celebrating too?

Not exactly!

They were gathered together, waiting as Jesus had instructed them, for the promised coming of '*another advocate to help you and be with you forever*' said John in 14:16 who Jesus assured them would come at some point after He had left them.

If you read the first chapter of Acts we see that there were the 12 apostles and 120 disciples gathered together to pray

You see, Jesus had been with them for the last 3 years

He had given them this great commission to *go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything He had commanded them* Matt 28:19 & 20

In our Gospel reading from John Jesus says '*Whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing, and they will do EVEN GREATER THINGS than these, because I am going to the Father.*' John 14:12

This was some pretty formidable task, even for those who had been learning first hand from Jesus for the last 3 years, and so God the Father, living in and through Jesus the Son had promised their followers, those who believed in Him, an advocate to be with them always and to help them in the task to which they had been called.

Spirit Comes

So out in the city of Jerusalem there are 1000's of people from all over the place, speaking a host of different dialects, celebrating the Jewish festival of Pentecost - the early wheat harvest 50 days after their big Passover celebration

Gathered together in a room somewhere, praying, is a group of about 130 people, each with the embers of their new faith, founded in their Jewish upbringing but dramatically impacted by their encounter with Jesus and His ministry and teaching waiting for the gift of 'the advocate' that they had been promised but that they had no comprehension of.

What happens next?

How many of you were - or are - guides or scouts?

As a teenager - and on into my 20's - I loved being a Guide and then a Ranger and then a Guide leader. The best part for me was going off to camp, usually with a friend of mine called Sue. As Rangers and then adult leaders, I was in charge of First Aid... and the loos! Sue was in charge of cooking and the fire. And that was when we had proper fires... twigs and sticks and logs and the crucial tinder that would get it all going!

I loved that moment when, with just a few, apparently fairly lifeless embers left over from the previous meal, you could gently fan the embers, and they would burst back in to life. Sometimes in the middle of cooking a meal something would go horribly wrong and the fire would appear to be going out and I might be summoned by Sue to come and fan the fire! What that actually meant was stand at the end with a metal plate and flap like crazy to fill the fire with a good dose of air to get it going again !!!

Some of you may have had open fires at home with a good set of bellows which had the same effect but with a little more decorum I suspect!!

The small, initial embers of a fire need a good injection of oxygen to get them going and to get the fire blazing

And maybe this is what the Pentecost festival celebration that we read about this morning was like!

The embers of faith that those first disciples of Jesus had suddenly ignited and burst in to flame as the Ruach of God - the breath of God blew through them

We read that they were all gathered to gather in one place

Suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind

This filled the house where they were sitting

What looked like fire appeared among them

They were filled with the Holy Spirit

They began to speak in other languages / dialects

That was quite a prayer meeting!

What then happened?

The gathered crowd from all over the place, with all their different languages and dialects, heard their own native language being spoken - thank you Brenda for reading all those names!

People thought the disciples were drunk

Peter stood up and spoke telling them that *'everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved'*

Role of the Holy Spirit

Jesus had promised His disciples that He would send an advocate

An advocate is someone who stands up in a law court and explains to the judge or jury how things are from the clients point of view - they plead the case of their client

The Holy Spirit does that for us. He pleads our case before God the Father as we pray

The Greek word paraclete that is translated in our reading from John as advocate can also be translated helper/assistant meaning to be our strength / energy in order to be able to live and witness to the love of Jesus - going to make disciples.

Think of a can of Red Bull - I don't know if you have ever drunk one of those high energy drinks, full of caffeine and all sorts of other things that are not great for us. When I was still teaching and in the middle of report writing time, I did resort to the odd can of Red Bull to keep me away and give me the help / energy to stay awake and keep writing in order to get the task done!

Well... the Holy Spirit is a far far better source of strength available in order to get the task done. The word paraclete could also be translated comforter that presence alongside us that brings comfort and strength to help us cope with a situation. The situation may not change but the Spirit is there to comfort and enable.

These 130 disciples of Jesus had a HUGE task ahead of them.

They had been commissioned to go and make disciples of all nations - Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria to the ends of the earth

Few of them, if any were great travellers or public speakers.

The ones we know most about were local fishermen, practically skilled but not trained speakers

They had many doubts and questions and had left Jesus to get on with it at various times

But the promised Holy Spirit was poured out upon them, their embers of faith were ignited by the breath of God

And 3000 were added to their number that day. And what we call the church was birthed.

Not a bad start bearing in mind that those 3000 people came from many different parts and would take their new found faith with them as they left Jerusalem and went back to their different homes, speaking their different languages.

Good work!

So what for us today?

Well - aren't there times when we need comfort - the strength to deal with a situation that is emotionally TOUGH. The situation may not go away and we need to find an inner strength and peace in order to deal with it

The Holy Spirit - the Comforter

What about the times when we just have to keep going. When we need some extra stamina?

The Holy Spirit - the helper

What about when we want to pray for a situation and we just don't have the words to say

The Holy Spirit - the advocate

But also, just as those first disciples were commissioned to go in to all the world and share the Gospel of hope and love of Jesus, to make disciples of all nations. That is our commission too.

To bring hope and love and light to our world

And I don't know about you but I need the strength and help and empowering of the Holy Spirit in order to do that

Peter the fisher man was just that. A unique but ordinary man who Jesus called who got things wrong and doubted his own ability and that of Jesus

But after waiting and praying with the others his embers of faith were fanned in to flames
He spoke simply of what he knew empowered and emboldened through the gift of the Holy Spirit
and many came to know and accept the love of Christ for themselves

We live in a world where many are hurting, emotionally and physically
Where people have lost hope and joy
Where they are searching for something to fill a hole in their life but they don't know what will fill it
We have a message of hope and love and joy and peace
But we need filling with the Holy Spirit to bring the embers of our faith to new life

Let's ask for that today as we celebrate not the original reason for Pentecost but the one we read
about in Acts

A prayer has been written for Pentecost this year so let's take a moment to reflect on what we have
heard and then pray this prayer together

Gracious God

We thank you that you brought us to know and recognise you
through our Lord Jesus Christ.

We thank you for those who shared the Gospel of Jesus with us.

We ask that in turn we may pass the Good News on to others.

Give us confidence to speak of you,
sensitivity to walk with others on their journey,
and love to inspire us to reach out to others.

Most of all, give us a passion to see your Kingdom come,
that we might take risky steps to be your witnesses to your world.

Through your Son, our Saviour, Jesus Christ. Amen