

Sermon preached by Revd Rachel McDougall

St Paul's Canterbury

Feast of Pentecost C

Sunday 5 June 2022

Waiting around is not my favourite activity.

It is easy to become impatient.

The disciples are waiting all together in one place.

I wonder what they were thinking?

At least they had each other's company. Jesus had ascended into heaven.

They had chosen a new follower Matthias to replace Judas.

As they wait together something amazing happens.

This all happens on the day of Pentecost which for Jews was the celebration of the bringing in the harvest and the giving of the law.

They hear a sound like the rush of wind, tongues as of fire resting on each.

In these four short verses Luke tries to put into words a life-changing experience, which renewed and inspired Jesus' followers for the journey ahead.

Luke describes the coming of the Holy Spirit as violent rushing wind and tongues as of fire.

They are images that speak of the unexpected and uncontrollable coming of the Holy Spirit

Wind and fire are not 'safe' comfortable controllable images. Violent wind can do damage.

Fire gives warmth and heat and light but is also unruly.

They are both forces that cannot be controlled.

Through this passage Luke is saying that the Spirit is something that is surprising and energizing but is also uncontainable.

It comes in a way that is not anticipated.

It is also a force that is enlivening.

The Holy Spirit is an energising life-force that is for all.

Everyone in that room receives this gift, every person speaks in another language as God gives the ability.

This Spirit is not just for special people but for all and is not just for people inside the room.

The experience of the Spirit propels them outside and a crowd gathers at the sound; each hears in their own language.

The Spirit is not just for a select group but is there for all people.

The Spirit also turns things upside down.

The people's reaction in Acts comes across as somewhat muted compared to the Greek words.

In the Greek it is clear what a raw upheaval this is.

The mixed reaction is confused, in an uproar beside themselves, undone, blown away, dis-oriented.

This new birth is not a comfortable experience.

It turns things upside down.

Peter turns a message of doom and destruction from Joel to be about new life and renewal.

He gives a message of hope about the Spirit being poured upon all flesh.

What does this message say to us today?

We are reminded that each of us is alive with the Spirit.

It is within each of us. The spirit is present within us all.

We are reminded that times of waiting are not in vain.

Restlessness can be transformed into something new.

God's Spirit continues to bring us together and offers us new life which does bring changes that are not always comfortable!

The living Spirit that is within us calls us to be who we already are, children of God who are blessed.

This means to put our hearts and our attention to God's Spirit and be open to where God leads.

The Spirit of God does not take us back to the past to comfortable ways of doing things.

We are encouraged to be open to the new life that is promised.

The Spirit of God is a force that renews and recreates in different ways to what we expect.

The Spirit that first flowed in those who followed Jesus continues to flow and renew people and communities across the generations.

It is said that there is a fresh deep renewal of the community of faith every 500 years or so in history.

Writers suggest that we now stand on the edges of such a time.

We are at a turning of the ages in a very different looking world with all that has been happening over the last couple of years. It is a time of upheaval and of renewal.

God's promise is that God's Spirit is with us.

The Spirit is with us and within us to renew and enliven us to prepare us for what is ahead.

It is there to help us communicate in different ways that can be understood. It is also present in the people around us.

The invitation is to be open to the Spirit and to trust it.

We are invited to trust the promptings of the Spirit that occur deep within us and in our community of faith.

Are we prepared to step into God's future whatever that may be?

We can be comfortable with where we are, yet that is not where God calls us to be.

God's Spirit does set new paths before us and invites us to have the courage to listen and respond.

Pope Francis recalls an old image for the Soul as a kind of sailboat.

'The Holy Spirit is the wind which fills its sails and drives it forward, and the gusts of wind are the gifts of the Spirit.

Lacking the Spirit's impulse and grace we do not go forward.

The Holy Spirit draws us into the mystery of the living God and saves us from the threat of a Church which is only concerned with itself (self-referential), closed in upon herself.

The Spirit impels us to open the doors and go forth to proclaim and bear witness to the good news of the Gospel, to communicate the joy of faith, the encounter with Christ.

The Holy Spirit is the soul of Mission. Let us ask ourselves do we tend to stay closed in on ourselves, on our group, or do we let the Holy Spirit open us to mission?'¹

¹ Pope Francis Homily May 19 2013 quoted in This is the Day May 2016 LTP Publications

The Spirit is God's living presence within us who leads us forwards and renews us.

May this be our prayer:

Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful people, and kindle in us the fire of your love. And, when you do come, help us to get out of our own way, so that you can work through us unimpeded.

Lord

***Take me where you want me to go,
Let me meet who you want me to meet
Tell me what you want me to say,
and keep me out of your way.***

-The Rev. Mychal Judge O.F.M.

Lectio:

Acts 2.1-21

Psalm 104.26-36

Romans 8.14-17

John 14.8-17