

## Pentecost Year C 2022

I can't decide whether today, the Feast of Pentecost, is a beginning or an ending. We sometimes say that Pentecost is the 'birthday of the church' - we should be singing 'happy Birthday to . . . us' - definitely a beginning. On the other hand, we could see it as an ending - the end of the story which began with Mary and the angel Gabriel, continued with birth, Magi, exile in Egypt, a visit to Jerusalem and the Temple, and then to John at the Jordan, wilderness and temptation, and then continuing with calling, teaching, healing - conflict, crucifixion, resurrection and ascension. And today, the fulfilment of the final promise - I will send another advocate (Jesus being the first). Now that sounds like mission accomplished - completion - ending. And yet the apparent climax of the story of Jesus, which we have been following for the last five months, Christmas, Epiphany, Lent, Holy Week and Passion, Easter and Ascensiontide, that climax becomes the beginning of a whole new story - the story of the church. So, yes it is an end, but it is also a beginning - as T S Elliot so wonderfully puts it in his poem *Little Gidding*. 'What we call the beginning is often the end/And to make an end is to make a beginning./The end is where we start from.'

And we start with the outpouring of the Spirit and the assurance to all who believe in him that although he has gone away, he is still with us now, through the Spirit.

The last supper he shared with his disciples and friends begins with the washing of the disciples' feet. He washes Judas' feet and Judas puts back on his sandals and goes out to betray him. Then Jesus starts to explain that he is going away. Both Peter and Thomas do not understand and ask him to explain himself - and then Philip steps in to ask a silly question - or rather to make a stupid demand - 'show us the Father'. One of the first to be called, with Jesus throughout his ministry, he still needs to see more clearly - 'Show us the Father, and we shall be satisfied'. Make everything crystal clear. Yet John has already told us in the Prologue to his Gospel 'No one has ever seen God.' The response from Jesus is unambiguous. 'Whoever has seen me has seen the Father'. It is the heart of the Gospel - he couldn't be more plain. Jesus and the Father are one. Those who see, hear, touch Jesus, see, hear and touch the Father. Those who saw Jesus turn water into wine, witnessed the Father at work. Those who heard Jesus call Lazarus out of the tomb heard the loving call of the Father. Those who ate bread and fish when there was

no (or very little) bread and fish rejoiced in the abundance of the Father. In his Gospel, John calls the miracles of Jesus 'signs', because they point people towards God who had sent Jesus.

And now, Jesus tells his followers he is going away, and yet he is not going away, because he is coming back - as Spirit. Just as the Father sent the Son, now the Father will send the Spirit - and all three are one.

Jesus promises 'another Paraclete' - advocate, counsellor, comforter, intercessor, strengthener, all round helper, and, as Jesus tells his disciples, this advocate is the spirit of truth, a teacher, who will remind them of everything he has taught them - and this spirit will abide in them, abide in us.

So today we can look back over the story of God the Son from Christmas to the Ascension, and look forward, with God the Holy Spirit, to the challenges which lie ahead of us, the challenges of being spirit filled, so that the words and works of the Father, seen in Jesus, are demonstrated amongst us, feeding, healing, giving life - so that the world may believe.

In the Nicene Creed we confess - that is, we say we believe - that the HS is Lord and giver of life. On the first Christian Day of Pentecost - remember, Pentecost is a

Jewish Festival - on that day the believers, now numbering about 120, were all gathered together and all were gifted the Spirit.

There is nothing in the text to suggest that being spirit filled is for church leaders only - ALL received. That is a challenge for all of us - we can't just leave things to a few 'special', 'chosen' people. The church does not dole out portions of the Spirit with Licences, Permissions, Warrants, pieces of paper. The Spirit is the gift of God to his people, that's you as well as me. And the Spirit is gifted for a purpose - to stand alongside and to strengthen and comfort us - yes - but is that all? Of course not, the Spirit is there to remind us of what Jesus had taught, shown, said - particularly of his last command - command, not suggestion or request, command - love one another, and not just love one another, but love one another as I have loved you. That is a big ask. 'As I have loved you'. That is why we need the Holy Spirit abiding in us - to give us the strength, the determination, the commitment, the humility, not only to love but to love as Jesus did. No wonder the spirit came upon them all, when they were gathered together in one place. Then they could share, share the joy and the pain, share their faith and their doubts, their fears and their commitment. Like us, they were not a group

of likeminded people who met and agreed to a new mode of living, but they were disciples of a man who had called them to follow him, to learn from him how God wanted them to live their lives. To do that, to follow him, to learn from him, well, to do that they / we would need help and Jesus had promised them the help they would need - the Paraclete, the Advocate, the comforter, the Holy Spirit - here amongst us now, the giver of life, calling us to be led into all truth and to live that truth, day after day after day.

When Jesus called his disciples he didn't say 'come for a walk with me and we will have a blether' - he said 'Follow me'. That is the same call we hear, or should hear, day by day, the call to be the presence of God in the world, in acts of kindness and goodness which give people life and hope and freedom from fear. So today really is a new beginning, but then, so is every day for 'new every morning is the love'.