**Sermons by The Rev’d Dr. Grayhame Bowcott ©**

**“Gathered and Sent”**

**The Day of Pentecost**

**Sunday May 23rd, 2021**

**St. George’s, The Anglican Parish of the Blue Mountains**

## Acts 2.1-21

## The Coming of the Holy Spirit

2When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. 2And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. 3Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. 4All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.

5 Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. 6And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each. 7Amazed and astonished, they asked, ‘Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? 8And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language? 9Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, 10Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, 11Cretans and Arabs—in our own languages we hear them speaking about God’s deeds of power.’ 12All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, ‘What does this mean?’ 13But others sneered and said, ‘They are filled with new wine.’

## Peter Addresses the Crowd

14 But Peter, standing with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed them: ‘Men of Judea and all who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and listen to what I say. 15Indeed, these are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only nine o’clock in the morning. 16No, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel:   
17 “In the last days it will be, God declares,  
that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh,  
   and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,  
and your young men shall see visions,  
   and your old men shall dream dreams.   
18 Even upon my slaves, both men and women,  
   in those days I will pour out my Spirit;  
     and they shall prophesy.   
19 And I will show portents in the heaven above  
   and signs on the earth below,  
     blood, and fire, and smoky mist.   
20 The sun shall be turned to darkness  
   and the moon to blood,  
     before the coming of the Lord’s great and glorious day.   
21 Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.”

The Lord be with you.

Let us pray.

Holy Spirit, Breath of Life, Source of Unity and Wisdom,

Manifest yourself among us.

Renew our spirit and our faith.

Uphold our ministries

And enable us to the mission of Christ’s Kingdom.

Make us to feel your presence,

that may we open our lives to you.

In the sacred name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Amen.

***What does the Spirit of God feel like?***

Have you ever experienced moments in your life when God’s presence is so close, so palpable that you can’t deny that he is present with you?

Moments when your soul has been set aflame and your faith has burned with conviction?

Times when you feel drawn back into the body of Christ that is the Church,

because here you feel gathered and embraced by a community that is being filled with the power of the Spirit?

Now it is not every day that we tangibly feel the Spirit of God in our midst.

There are times when we beg: O God, where are you right now?

I know that throughout this pandemic there have been times when, without the embodiment of the gathered community in worship, I have struggled to feel as connected to God as our normal Sunday services usually express to me.

But in the sacred moments when we find ourselves open to God’s action in our lives,

and the Spirit is present among us, our doubts, our disagreements, our divisions evaporate and we believe that through the power of God we can achieve anything that God is calling us to do. These moments are Pentecost moments, and I believe they are what defines the Church as being a unique community within the world.

The Day of Pentecost was unlike any day that had ever been experienced by the followers of Jesus because in the moment that God sent the Holy Spirit to be among them and within them, they could not doubt the faith in Jesus that had led them to commit their lives to the preaching of this new Gospel to the world and to the founding of the Church as had been commissioned by Jesus.

But experiencing God the Spirit within them was very different than experiencing Jesus as their friend and teacher.

When God made God’s self manifest through the birth of Jesus, son of Mary, God choose to empty himself of power and divinity so that he would live life as a man in order to relate to us who are human. Jesus was a Person of the Holy Trinity, sent to us for the purpose of making God known to the world in an entirely new way.

Another manner of saying this would be: God desired to be an ordinary human in order to be in relationship with humanity – to people like you and I.

And that’s exactly what happened when Jesus gathered his disciples who were fishermen, who were Hebrew women of faith, people were the simple, ordinary folk of the day, people who were not necessarily saints, who were people of doubt and scepticism, who were ordinary people believing that they could only do ordinary things. God, the Son, gathered this community together in order to transform them into something new – something different in the world.

And Jesus taught them that in God all things are possible.

This was the message that he called them to believe and live out.

But when Jesus ascended into heaven there was a great sense of loss.

Jesus knew that he would be gathered home to his Father in heaven – this was always part of God’s plan of salvation for us – but that plan didn’t always makes sense to Jesus’ friends and followers.

In the same way that the disciples of Jesus mourned when he had died,

they also mourned when he ascended into heaven.

Because, God was no longer felt to be present with them.

Jesus wasn’t physically there with them any more.

And again the disciples felt alone in the world.

Ordinary people, given the near impossible task of spreading the Gospel,

and now without Jesus, their Lord, to guide them every step of the way.

But Jesus had made a promise to them when he said:

I will not leave you alone.

I will send an Advocate and helper to guide you.

Await the coming of the Spirit!

***What does the presence of the Holy Spirit feel like?***

The verb that describes the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost in Greek is the word “***playrow”*** , in English “to fill.”

Acts 2. Verse 4 reads: “***Kai eplaysthsaysan pantes pneumatos hagiou.”***

“They were ***filled*** with the Holy Spirit.”

Other meanings or connotations of “***playrow***” include “fulfilled” and “completed.”

So when the Holy Spirit manifested herself to the followers of Jesus this is how they described it:

First the house in which they were gathered seemed filled by a divine presence.

Filled, completely engulfed, as forceful as a violent wind.

And then the disciples themselves experienced the same feeling,

only this time with their own bodies being filled, engulfed and, in another understanding, completed.

The greek verb “***playrow***” is used again when bystanders are trying to explain to each other what has happened. Their best guess is that the disciples are “filled with wine” and drunk.

But, as Peter declares, this sense of being filled with God’s presence is also a sense of being fulfilled and completed by the Holy Spirit, not drunk and disabled.

A feeling that opens you up to the Wisdom and possibilities of God.

A feeling of being connected to something far greater than yourself.

A feeling of the power of heaven being present here on earth – truly remarkable!

***This is what the Holy Spirit feels like.***

And it left the disciples amazed, astonished and renewed in their faith.

Have you ever experienced something like this?

I have. In many times of our Church gathered together in worship, in times of discernment, in times of our reaching out to care for others.

Perhaps not with the same result of hovering tongues of fire and violent winds, but with the same sense of being filled with God’s presence and wrapped in the awareness that in those moments I was a part of something greater than myself – something that wasn’t simply human.

In the Acts passage, it is interesting to note that the wind is said to come “from heaven”.

The Spirit is sent to us from heaven by God the Father and the Son.

I think that the point of making this fact explicit in the text is to show that through the power of the Spirit, God continues to be present in the work that is done on earth, not with the aim of giving the followers of Jesus a “spiritual experience”. But rather with the point of transforming and sanctifying the activities that we do on earth with the very power of heaven.

This transformation starts in our bodies, in our hearts and minds as we are drawn to follow in the ways of Jesus, but then it continues to bond together and shape the essence of the entire community of the faithful which we call the Church.

I also think that is it incredibly important to note that the Holy Spirit doesn’t simply gather Christians in together. It isn’t sent to hide and protect us from the world.

Instead, the manifestation of the Spirit drives people of faith out into the world, in the same way that the Spirit drove Jesus out into the wilderness.

Pentecost, for us as followers of Christ, is the reminder that, like the very essence of God’s own self, we are called to be a people sent beyond the walls of our Church to care for the needs of the world. To bear the transformation of heaven out in our actions, in our worship and in the ways that we are commissioned by God to serve others.

Jesus says, Go and proclaim the Gospel. God and love God and your neighbour as yourself. Go out and form new relationships with others, and then, draw them closer to you and to God the Father, through baptism, through prayer and worship, through the Body of Christ on earth that we call the Church.

Gathered and Sent.

Sent out in order to gather others into a relationship with God.

This are the primary actions of the Church. Actions set in motion by the Holy Spirit.

When we open ourselves to the presence of God’s Spirit in the world we become participants in God’s desire to be in relationship with all people.

And this power cannot but transform us in the process.

Because it is it the opposite of the selfish, individual, protectionist ethos that is so prevalent in the world today.

It is opposite, I believe, because it doesn’t come from the world. The Spirit doesn’t come from us, it comes from heaven and from God’s love for us and all people.

As such, let us embrace it.

Let us embrace the activity of God that gather us together in fellowship and worship and then continuously send us out to invite others to join us.

Gathered in order to be sent out again and again and again.

May this be the message that blesses us this Pentecost.

Let us close with prayer.

Gracious and loving God,

We give you thanks for the gift of your presence among us,

For your Son Jesus Christ and for the guidance and fulfillment of the Holy Spirit.

17 God declares: “For in the last days it will be,  
that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh – UPON ALL PEOPLE,

21 Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.”

As it is written, so shall it be.

In the Name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Amen.