

St Marc Grenoble
Sunday 23rd May 2021 - PENTECOST
John 15: 6 - 19
Psalm 104: 24 - 34
Acts: 2: 1 - 21
‘What does this Mean??’

Good morning - to all of you, both here and on Zoom - It is great to be worshipping with you, this Pentecost morning. **Let's Pray**

For me, and I suspect for many others, Pentecost is one of the most exciting and most startling celebrations in our Christian year - indeed, in our Christian history.

Let's just take a moment to establish what ``**Pentecost**' originally meant. **Can anyone suggest the origin?**

Pentecost literally means fiftieth, and Pentecost - or the Feast of Weeks, as it is in the Jewish Calendar, comes exactly fifty days after the Feast of Firstfruits, which is celebrated on the first day of the week (Sunday) after Passover – so, Pentecost or the Feast of Weeks is always on a Sunday.

At the Feast of Firstfruits a sheaf of corn was waved before God; then at the Feast of Weeks two loaves of Bread were presented before the altar.

It is also important to note that even further back, historically, Pentecost was the day when, following the Children of Israel's escape from Egypt, Moses first went up Mount Sinai to receive the Ten commandments from God. So this festival has a great deal of importance in the history of God's people.

Reading the previous chapter, this probably all began in the 'upper room' where the disciples had first met Jesus after His resurrection; and there were, almost certainly, a lot more people than only Jesus' immediate disciples - there were men and women praying there together - possibly as many as 120 people or so (no social distancing!!)

At the start of this reading, we're told the Disciples "were all together in the same place"; Jesus had told them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait for the Holy Spirit, the Counsellor and Comforter, whom the Father had promised.

Any ideas what they may have been doing? Waiting, praying, hiding hoping, expecting, sharing fellowship and eating together ...

Suddenly – without any warning – there was a *sound* like a gale force wind

(we know how that sounds! - Hurricane Irma), which filled the whole building. NB the sound, but no suggestion of the actual wind - the original word *Ruach*, apparently means both wind and spirit.

Then, perhaps, rather like a wildfire, the Holy Spirit spread through their ranks with what looked like tongues of flame, which came to rest on each head ...

[Has anyone ever seen a wildfire? It's totally uncontrollable, very fast, and consumes everything in its path.]

The noise and commotion attracted a large crowd of people, who came to see what all the noise was about.

Then, these uneducated men from Galilee began speaking in all kinds of different languages. People from all over the Jewish world – heard and understood the Good News about Jesus in their own language.

There's no way the disciples would have known these languages – but they were empowered by the Holy Spirit.

Imagine the amazement and excitement as people realised what was happening?? In v. 12 We're told 'Everyone was astonished and perplexed'

'What does this mean??' they were asking each other

I'm sure even the disciples were ecstatic at this remarkable sign of God's power, which descended from heaven. Why? Because this sign confirmed, or guaranteed, that Jesus had ascended to His rightful place at the right hand of God the Father. Nothing would ever be the same again!

Of course, there were also sceptics who, because they couldn't understand the different languages, thought the disciples were drunk. That's ridiculous, because when people are drunk, they're usually much harder to understand. On this occasion it was easier for folk from all over the world to understand what they were saying - they heard the message in their own languages!

Then, Peter stood up and preached his first sermon – and what a sermon this big fisherman preached! He explained to the people exactly where, in the Book of Joel, these things had been prophesied, hundreds of years earlier.

He spoke out with bold urgency; it was amazing; and what's even more amazing is that, a little later in the chapter, we're told that about 3,000 people joined the church, and were baptised on that one day. (There's me thinking that to baptise 15 people in one day - as we hope to do next Sunday, is a lot!)

Whenever the Holy Spirit is involved, amazing things always happen (not always as visible and public) and people's lives are dramatically transformed!

'What does this mean for us??'

We should pray for the Holy Spirit to come among us – today!

The prophecy in Joel that Peter preached from (Joel 2: 28 – 32) tells us about that: God says 'In the last days I will pour out my Spirit on all people; your sons and daughters will prophesy; young men will see visions, old men will dream dreams; and God promises wonders in heaven and signs on earth

But, the most exciting, and yet the most challenging thing in that prophecy is the final line, which says: '*Everyone* who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved'.

That's a wonderful and reassuring promise – not 'everyone who's perfect', or even 'everyone who's good'; it says '*everyone* who calls on the name of the Lord' **WILL** be saved.

So if, like me, you have a few little weaknesses, or failures, or imperfections - Be encouraged - we are promised that '*everyone*' who calls on the name of the Lord **WILL** be saved. **WE HAD BETTER START CALLING**

That's a really special promise and, like Peter, we cannot possibly keep it to ourselves, we simply have to share it !

But, as we talk and learn about the amazing events at Pentecost, there is a danger we'll concentrate more on **WHAT** happened, than **WHY** it happened.

The Holy Spirit was poured out on the disciples at Pentecost, just as Jesus had promised - and as they'd been praying, in order to equip and empower them to be Jesus' witnesses as He instructed them: "in Jerusalem, all over Judea and Samaria, even to the ends of the world."

What does all this mean for us - here in St Marc's??

We are also called to be Jesus' witnesses - 'even to the ends of the world'! Although many of us (me included) are sometimes frightened by the thought of being His witnesses even to the end of the street!

Which is why Jesus promises us the presence of the Holy Spirit - to equip, assist and empower us to do His work.

I'm sure many of us have already experienced the Holy Spirit working in our lives? I have, on many occasions - though not always in quite such spectacular and public ways. But, I have often experienced the Holy Spirit helping me do things, which I never thought it possible for me to do.

We should never be surprised, or frightened, when we witness, or experience the Holy Spirit working in our lives - rather we should expect it! Because when we do what God asks us to do, He's already promised the help of His Spirit to empower us

As an aside, I should say God will never force His help onto us; we need to call on Him and be willing to let Him work with and through us, by His Spirit.

Some people I know are nervous about asking for the Spirit's help; I think because they're afraid they may lose control; - that is never the case. God wants to help and strengthen us; not to frighten or make us fearful.

Although the work God asks us to do may sometimes seem difficult, and uncomfortable, we can be reassured we will not be alone if we try to do what God wants.

If you're in any doubt, read through the Book of the 'Acts of the Apostles' and learn about some of the amazing ways He transformed the growing church.

Those stories are tremendously re-assuring; because so often I feel inadequate or incapable of doing the things God wants. But, I'm encouraged knowing the Holy Spirit is there to help - and all I need to do is ask!

What does this mean? It means God is calling us to be His witnesses.

God has a plan for each one of us. Although, of course, I have no idea what it is for you personally. That's between you and God!

This week, spend some unhurried time, alone (ideally) in a quiet place with God - read Acts chapter 2 again, then ask Him to make it clear what He wants you to do. It needs some serious prayer, and patient, expectant, listening to clearly understand what it is.

If you need help with the prayer, or encouragement, or confirmation of what you think He is asking you, please don't hesitate to ask.

- I will either spend some time with you myself, or suggest someone who I think may be able to help you.

What does this mean?

Now is time for us all to act - the most important thing is NOT to do nothing ...

God is calling YOU - be sure YOU answer!

No-one else can do it for you ...

Let's pray ...