

St Marc, Grenoble
Pentecost Sunday, 5th June 2022
John 14: 8 - 17
Acts 2: 1 - 8, 11b - 21
'All Together'

Good morning, and welcome to everyone - those here in Church, and those joining us on Zoom - it is really good to be back. **Let's Pray**

As usual, before I start, I would really like to hear from you; and to learn what it was that you picked up from our readings today - what stood out for you, and what you made of them???

Today is Pentecost. Possibly the most exciting and most startling celebration in our Christian year - indeed, in our Christian history.

Pentecost literally means 'fiftieth', and Pentecost - or the Feast of Weeks, as it is in the Jewish Calendar, comes fifty days after the Feast of Firstfruits, which is celebrated on the first day of the week (Sunday) after Passover – so, Pentecost is always on the Sunday 50 days from Easter Day.

In the Church year, it's the end of Easter season today; and the whole cycle celebrating Jesus' earthly ministry, which began in Advent, last December.

The Pentecost story marks the start of a new phase in the life of the early Christian church; of which 2,000+ years later, we continue to be a part.

It also saw the fulfilment of Jesus' promise, which we heard in our Gospel reading (John 14: 15 - 17), that He would send the disciples - (and by derivation us) another helper to be with us forever - the Spirit of Truth who Jesus said will live with us for ever.

The disciples probably didn't have a clue what He was talking about when He said it - but after the events of Pentecost they won't have been left in any doubt at all. Jesus promised He would not leave us bereft and the dramatic arrival of the Holy Spirit validates and endorses that promise.

Reading the previous chapter, it seems the events of Pentecost began - you could say 'kicked off' in the 'upper room, where the disciples had first met Jesus after His resurrection. At the start of this passage, 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.

There were many more people than just Jesus' immediate disciples - we're told there were men and women gathered there together - possibly as many as about 120 people - no doubt all tightly packed together.

What do you think they were doing? Waiting, praying, hiding, hoping, expecting something, or someone, sharing fellowship and eating together ...

Suddenly there was a complete shock – there came from heaven a *noise* like the sound of a strong wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. N.B. we're told about the sound, but there's no suggestion of the actual wind - the original word used - *Ruach*, means both wind and spirit.

Then, tongues, seemingly made of fire, appeared to them, moving apart and coming to rest on each one of them. The Holy Spirit spread among them and we're told: "They were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them the words to say. Can you imagine the buzz??

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

These uneducated men from Galilee had begun to speak in all kinds of different languages. People from all over the Jewish world – heard and understood the Good News about Jesus, in their own native languages.

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

The disciples were ecstatic at this remarkable sign of God's power, which descended from heaven. This sign confirmed, or guaranteed, that Jesus had ascended to His rightful place at the right hand of God the Father.

It was the beginning of something completely new. Nothing would ever be the same again! The Holy Spirit was drawing people out of their own concerns, to consider each other's needs; and transforming all of them. They had the experience together; it was the start of building the new 'church' community - worshipping Jesus and being empowered by the Holy Spirit to work together.

Of course, there were also sceptics who, because they couldn't understand the different languages, thought the disciples were drunk. Which was silly, because when people are drunk, they're usually much harder to understand.

But, on this occasion, it was easier for folk from all over the world to understand - they heard God's message in their own languages!

Then, Peter stood up and preached his first sermon – and what a sermon he preached! He explained to the people where these things were prophesied, in the Book of Joel, hundreds of years earlier. He spoke with bold urgency; and what's even more amazing is we're told that about 3,000 people joined the church, and were baptised on that one day.

Whenever the Holy Spirit is involved, remarkable things happen (not always quite as visible and public). People's lives are dramatically transformed! The Holy Spirit empowers and establishes all of us, whoever we are, wherever we come from and however marginalised we may feel.

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'

The most exciting, 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 wonderfully reassuring promise – it doesn't say everyone who's perfect, or everyone who's good or everyone of a particular race; it says, simply: '*everyone* who calls on the name of the Lord' **WILL** be saved.

If, like me, you ever feel weak or inadequate or you have a history of failures, or imperfections - Be encouraged - we are promised that '*everyone*' who calls on the name of the Lord **WILL** be saved.

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

That event, at Pentecost, was the beginning of the Christian church; defining its character and learning its purpose - learning to work together as a community empowered by the Holy Spirit.

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 - in our delightful, disparate, international, multilingual community??

It's a special promise 'forever'; and like Peter, we cannot possibly keep it to

All of us, here in St Marc's, are called to be Jesus' witnesses - 'even to the ends of the world!' Although many of us (me included) are sometimes intimidated 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.

We must pray for the Holy Spirit to come among us and empower us – today and every day!

Let's Start Calling on the Name of the Lord together - TODAY!

Come Holy Spirit ...

Let's Pray