

PENTECOST 2022 – Acts 2:1-4,14-21 (& John 7-37-39) – The Promised Holy Spirit

Today is a special day. In the church's life, it's Pentecost Sunday, one of the major celebrations of the Christian calendar. But of course, it's also Platinum Jubilee weekend. Many of us will be celebrating in all kinds of ways – perhaps with family or friends, or with the wider community. Our Queen has reached a unique milestone, one we've never seen before, and maybe one we'll never see again in the life of our nation.

But as we give thanks for the amazing life and reign of Queen Elizabeth, I want to take us back 75 years, to a radio broadcast in 1947 which has shaped the three quarters of a century that would follow it. On Princess Elizabeth's 21st birthday, she made this promise to the nation: 'I declare before you all that my whole life, whether it be long or short, shall be devoted to your service... God help me to make good my vow, and God bless all of you who are willing to share in it.'

And so we gather this weekend to celebrate many things about our Queen: her faith, her steadfastness, her humility, her wisdom. But I want to suggest today that what we also gather to celebrate is that promise which the young princess made 75 years ago, and which she has spent the rest of her life fulfilling.

The best promises usually take time to come to pass. It's easy for any of us to make a promise we've no intention of keeping, or one which we can make good on very quickly. But to honour something which you vowed a long time ago – **that is the kind of promise worth celebrating.**

And on this day of Pentecost, we celebrate and give thanks for that kind of promise. The Day of Pentecost was an event centuries in the making. The Holy Spirit has been around since the beginning of time: it was brooding over the waters (to use that great phrase) when the world as we knew it didn't even exist. Then it came powerfully on certain individuals: think of Moses, or Gideon or some of the great kings and prophets.

But at some point there had to be more; there had to come a moment when God's Spirit would be freely available, enabling any human being to grow into the image of God that we all bear, but which is often so badly damaged. This pouring out was promised first by Joel about 800 years before Jesus, in the passage which Peter quotes to the crowd; it was reiterated two or three centuries later, first by Jeremiah and then by Ezekiel.

And then.... nothing. Or apparently nothing. Israel was conquered, the prophets died out, the generations passed. The odd mini revival, the odd fake Messiah.... would the promise ever come to pass? Had God forgotten? PAUSE

As with the Jubilee, there are so many things to celebrate about Pentecost:

We can celebrate the people. One thing that always inspires me is just **who God's Spirit falls on.** It's not the elite, the privileged – it's a bunch of fisherman, artisans and failed revolutionaries.... in other words, normal people. The Holy Spirit is no respecter of persons. Status doesn't count. Nor does wealth or breeding or education. What counts is a heart which is open to God.

We can celebrate **the prayer**. We shouldn't miss that prior to Pentecost, those disciples had been 'constantly' in prayer (1:14). **Pentecost reminds us that God answers prayer.** Especially the sort of prayer that Jesus encourages us to pray. As we heard in our gospel reading, Jesus himself invited people: 'If anyone is thirsty, let them come to me and drink.' After Easter, the disciples did just that, and here at Pentecost they drank deeply.

We can celebrate **the power**. This is obviously the headline for Pentecost. In the gospels we get other images – the dove, the water of life, the encourager – and they're all important to give us a fully rounded view of who the Spirit is. But here is **something more dynamic – here we get rushing wind and fire.** The power to change the world is precisely that – real power. Not force or fear, but the visible sign of God in the world, changing lives, empowering ordinary people to do extraordinary things.

So today we can celebrate that God gives real spiritual power to real, ordinary people as an answer to real, faithful prayer... BUT this is not where I want to land today: what struck me this week as I prepared is that **God keeps his promises.** The Day of Pentecost is no accident: it was promised centuries ago, and came almost as soon as Jesus went back to heaven – just as he promised. Peter said as much in his sermon to the crowd later that day: 'Exalted to the right hand of God, Jesus has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and has poured out what you now see and hear.'

God hadn't forgotten. Not a bit of it. We may not always understand God's timing, but we *can* trust his goodness and faithfulness. Our great God keeps his promises. The Spirit was poured out – and keeps being poured out today. Pentecost is not just a historic event to look back on with a certain wistfulness, as if God doesn't really do that kind of thing any more. Pentecost is now; Pentecost is every day.

Since Pentecost, the Spirit is able to dwell in any heart who will receive him: the divine presence filling each of us with love and joy, peace and purpose. A fire which burns up the bad stuff in our lives; a healing spring of life which soothes our wounds; and a wind which blows us to the world, taking God's love and message with us. This is what we celebrate at Pentecost – and still celebrate, even in 2022.

The promised Holy Spirit is still available *now*: today, let's take God at his word and invite this Spirit into our lives afresh. As generation upon generation has cried out, may we cry out again today: Come Holy Spirit!