

SERMON

Pentecost Sunday

The Archbishop of Canterbury

Come Holy Spirit as we look at your word, as we think about the gift of your presence to us today. Amen.

The fall of the Holy Spirit on the disciples gathered in Jerusalem at the first Pentecost was an outburst of divine creative energy which has, ever since, set hearts on fire and changed the world. The Holy Spirit is the life of God. The Holy Spirit creates, puts things as they should be, gives direction, sends the world in the right way.

In our time, again in 2020, the Holy Spirit calls us forward, leads us out to be changed internally and to change the world. We celebrate the evidence of the work of the Spirit all around us. We've seen such an outpouring of community, of service and love from carers, essential workers, people staying locked down. We've seen the Church of England being the Church for and with England. St Peter's Church in Brighton, whose building is used to prepare and send out 2000 meals a week to those living in hostels, the foodbank in Whitehawk scaling up their provision massively so 60 volunteers make sure 600 people have food each week, and on my doorstep the phenomenal care of hospital chaplains at St Thomas's. Three instances amongst thousands of the Holy Spirit turning the church inside out for the sake of God's suffering world.

This is the same fire from God that touched the disciples. The presence of the Holy Spirit turns humans from being turned in on themselves, to being turned out towards the world, founded in communities of love such as we heard of at the end of the reading.

This year it would be so easy to talk of hopes dashed. There is deep grief at the loss of so many human beings. There is deep fear at the economic cataclysm that is falling upon us. The disciples feared. Struggle and suffering cause fear for every generation. Yet God answers, "yes, but I will build the future. I do this as I pour out my life upon you. Choose to receive from me, choose to depend only on me". God says to God's church: "Here is the power to go into the world, to build my Kingdom of love, peace, mercy, justice and righteousness. Here is the power to see my will on earth as in heaven."

Now is the time to look forward and cast ourselves into the hands of God. Now we must pray “Holy Spirit, come.” At its heart must be dependence, not dependence on ourselves, dependence on God through Christ. No tricks, no idols, not wealth, power or prestige, simply raw, undiluted God, poured upon us, shown in love for God, for each other, even for opponents and enemies.

Pentecost marks the end of the period of prayer between Ascension and this Sunday. Ten days of prayer for people to be so touched by the Spirit of God that their hearts open to the abundant life of Jesus Christ. We’ve each been called to pray for five people - let us continue to do so that they may find the reality of this transforming love of God.

A nation or a world that puts its trust in anything that it has created itself will find that it has built an idol which will fall. It may be wealth, it may be finance, it may be an economy, it may be any human institution. It will fall. Peter’s message on that first Pentecost was a call to “repent”, literally, to turn around; to change direction. Now is the time to turn from anything other than dependence on God. Now is the time to seek God, to receive the very life of God. An individual, a church, a society, a world that puts trust in God, revealed in Jesus Christ, full of the Spirit of love, will see a new explosion of purpose and hope.

This is a purpose which costs everything and returns more than we can imagine. It cost Jesus everything to give this life to us. Our response means we can share in that life. We are caught up in more abundant life than we can imagine. We become the people of God for a world seeking light in darkness.