

CUTTING EDGE CAMELOT, No 25

Sunday 31st May 2020, Pentecost Sunday

‘Virtually Church but with some way to go...’

Welcome

Welcome to this edition of Cutting Edge Camelot on Pentecost Sunday. We celebrate the coming of the Holy Spirit on the first disciples on Pentecost Sunday as the dramatic reading from Acts records.

But did this outpouring happen just once or is it an event that continues to be repeated throughout the church’s history in different forms and different contexts? Ron reflects on his and others’ experience of being renewed by the Holy Spirit in his church in Sittingbourne. And I am also reminded of some wonderful Alpha ‘Holy Spirit’ Saturdays that we have held in these parishes where we have prayed for those present to be filled with the Holy Spirit. We cannot for obvious reasons do the same this year. However, we can in our own way and pray for the Holy Spirit to come to us and God will answer this prayer.

Scripture Passage

Acts 2: 1-21

When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place.

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

Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each.

Amazed and astonished, they asked, "Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language? Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabs -- in our own languages we hear them speaking about God's deeds of power."

All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, "What does this mean?"

But others sneered and said, "They are filled with new wine."

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. Indeed, these are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only nine o'clock in the morning. No, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel: '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. Even upon my slaves, both men and women, in those days I will pour out my Spirit; and they shall prophesy. And I will show portents in the heaven above and signs on the earth below, blood, and fire, and smoky mist. The sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood, before the coming of the Lord's great and glorious day. Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.'

Reflection

In the 1970s, something strange and wonderful happened in Sittingbourne, in Kent, where I lived - and in other places around the country. Churches began to experience an outpouring of the Holy Spirit that changed - and divided - the congregations. People, encouraged by their clergy, asked God to fill them, personally, with his Holy Spirit, and he did. We referred to it then as “renewal”, and conversations over coffee would include the question, “Have you been renewed?”

The process itself was simple. We prayed, alone, or preferably with other people (laying on of hands was a useful symbol) that God would fill us with his Spirit. More than once, the recipient began spontaneously to speak in a strange, foreign-sounding language. Sometimes there were tears, of joy and release. Sometimes there was nothing but an inner feeling, that would express itself in various ways. My then wife, Chris, spoke in tongues. I never did.

Our worship at St Michael’s changed, and became more spontaneous, joyful and exciting. We found (and in my case wrote) new songs and hymns, and there was much more joining in. True, there were people who wanted nothing to do with any of it, and while a lot of us were enjoying after service coffee in the church room, a Reader was leading Prayer Book Matins in the church. Others laughed at the whole idea, and thought we’d grow out of it. But we put this down to what Jesus said - if you try to put new wine in old wineskins, you get split wineskins!

Over a two-year period, seven men (and later, two women) offered themselves for training for the ordained ministry, but the church flourished, despite losing those families as we went off to college.

Things settled down a bit, but the Holy Spirit still fills those churches, and many others. For me, it showed up the difference between being a

churchgoer, and a Spirit-filled Christian. Our Bible studies showed us that one prayer we might make which will always be answered with an enthusiastic “Yes!” from God, is our request for his Holy Spirit. This is at the core of the *Ask, Seek, Knock*, passage (Luke 11: 9-13). Jesus says, “Bad as you are, you know how to give good things to your children. How much more, then, will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!”

When Paul went to Ephesus, (Acts 19: 1-7) he asked the Christians there, “Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you became believers?” and they said they had never heard there was a Holy Spirit. Paul himself then baptised them *placed his hands on them*, and they were filled with the Holy Spirit, they spoke in tongues, and went out proclaiming God’s message.

The story of Pentecost doesn’t end. But if we become a church of Spirit-filled people, prepare for changes. That was what some people in Kent feared - that their church would change, when they were quite happy with it as it was. And prepare for individual change. First, we need to be ready to receive him - that’s what the space between the Ascension and Pentecost was for. The Holy Spirit is a gentleman - he doesn’t come in where he isn’t welcome, so we have to make room in our lives for him which might mean clearing out some stuff first. But be assured, that if you really want to be filled with God’s Holy Spirit, you only have to ask. And then, if you don’t notice any spectacular difference, trust God that he has kept his promise, and the Spirit of God is upon you and within you.

Later, in Gloucestershire, I went to watch the Severn Bore. The tidal surge coming up the river, as the channel narrows, causes a wave to rush upstream - big enough for surfers to ride. Quite exciting to watch. But the point is this. When the wave passes, the water level behind it is higher! So a renewal of ourselves, and our churches, might look like a passing phenomenon, but when the first excitement dies down, the church is stronger, livelier, and dare I say it? More fun!

Ron

Hymn Suggestion

There are numerous hymns and songs which ask for the coming of the Holy Spirit. One well known one is 'Breathe on me Breath of God'. A Taize chorus is 'Holy Spirit come to us'. An example of a modern chorus is 'Come Holy Spirit and fill my heart' (Tony Yu). All these and many others can be found on YouTube.

Points for Prayers

- Thanksgiving and prayers for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit
- Thanksgiving for care, skill and courage of NHS workers and those in care homes
- Those suffering from coronavirus in hospitals, care homes and at home
- Need for further largescale testing
- Prayers for parents, teachers, governors and children in implementing the process of partial reopening of schools
- Funerals needing to take place under new restrictions with only family mourners. Tristram is taking a funeral on Wednesday.
- Prayers for those affected economically by the lockdown, for businesses and those who have become unemployed
- Prayers and thanksgiving for contributions to the foodbanks and for those helping to take these to the foodbanks.

Churches and the Roadmap on easing the lockdown

Please see the note distributed with CEC No 21 on Sunday 17th May.

Diocesan weekly livestreamed services and reflections

Bishop Peter and Bishop Ruth will be livestreaming a mid-week Eucharist each week and offering recorded reflections each Sunday.

For further details please see the Diocesan website.

Church of England Daily Hopeline

The Archbishop of Canterbury has launched a new telephone service, 'Daily Hopeline'. If you ring the free number 0800 804 8044 you can hear a recorded message and can also listen to well-known hymns along with prayers and a reflection based on a hymn.

Premier Radio

Available from Premier Radio (DAB radio and channel 725 via Freeview TV) Sunday morning of sacred music, songs and teaching etc, 7.00am-12.00 noon. Includes 'Hearts and Hymns' by Pam Rhodes, 8.00 to 10.00am with great variety of hymns and accompanying information.

Bible studies on weekday mornings.

Some other streamed resources

Here are a selection of some streamed resources available online which you may find helpful:-

- The Royal School of Church Music website provides a Hymn of the Day and Sunday Self-Service with music, readings and prayers.
- The Prayer Book Society has details of online streaming of BCP services.

An inclusive Communion celebrated on behalf of the benefice

Ron and Pam will be celebrating Communion regularly in their home each Sunday at 10.00am. Please be aware of this because even though no-one can join them they are praying for us all and hope that you will feel included in this act of Communion.

Growing as a worshipper, a servant and a family

*We pray that 'we might live in love,
as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us' (Ephesians 5:2)*