

St. Brandon's - Pentecost, 4.6.17
The Coming of the Holy Spirit on the Disciples of Brancepeth
Pentecost 2017, Acts 2. 1-21; 1 Cor. 12. 3b-13; John 14. 8.17, 25-27

Rick Simpson

Sing:
Come Holy Spirit.
Come Holy Spirit.
Maranatha.
Come Lord come. X 2

INTRODUCTION: When the day of Pentecost had come ...

A reading from the Acts of the Apostles of Brancepeth:

And when the day of Pentecost had come, they – that is, the Christians of Brancepeth – 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 whole church where they were sitting. And tongues of fire appeared, and rested on each one of them. All were filled with the Holy Spirit, and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them utterance ...

1. Not expecting that ...

Is that what we are expecting? It's Pentecost, the day we remember the giving of the Holy Spirit to the church, and we pray for that gift now; here we are. But is this what we are expecting? An indoor hurricane, flames appearing around us, and then very strange, extraordinary events? Something you can see, feel, and hear?

I suspect ... not.

We are *not* expecting gales, fire and the spontaneous ability to speak Spanish or Arabic. Rightly or wrongly, we're just *not*.

So does that mean today is merely a history lesson, a memory of something that happened once somewhere else, but does not make any difference now? Whatever weird thing that was, long ago, that *was* then, this is now?

Well, no, I can't think that can be right, either.

So: it is Pentecost; what *are* we expecting?
Anything at all?
Nothing unusual?
Nothing different?
Should we expect *something*?

I think so. But what?

2. Living Water

One of the pictures Jesus used to describe the promise gift of the Spirit was of water, flowing freely. We heard it in our gospel reading:

“Jesus said, “If anyone is thirsty, come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, it will be as if living water is flowing out from your heart.” Jesus said this about the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were to receive.”

Now, this is partly a picture of thirst being quenched, of need being met: “If you are thirsty, come to me and drink.” It’s the same thing Jesus said to a woman at a well, that he could give her living water to quench her thirst for ever.

Well, do *you* thirst for ... love, peace, meaning in life? Do you thirst for something you can’t quite put your finger on – but you *are* restless inside, yearning? Do you thirst for comfort, or hope?

Jesus calls the thirsty to come, and he will give us the drink which we need. It’s the promise that God really is, underneath it all, and above all, that which we truly desire, the one in whom all our yearning finds its answer.

The Holy Spirit was promised so that this, our deepest hunger, would be satisfied; we don’t know what we really need; but our hungers in life really come down to a craving for God.

Yet the picture is more than that. Jesus immediately said more, that from out of the thirsty one who has come to Jesus, streams of living water will then *flow*. We don’t just find what *we* need, what we really wanted but perhaps did not realise, in him. Not only are our hearts filled. No, the same living water then also pours *from* us.

God’s gifts are never given to us just for our benefit, but for others too.

Salvation can never be a personal possession, hoarded like a dragon's treasure; it's a something that's shared if we have it all, and renewed as we give it away. That is the promise of the work of the Holy Spirit in us, and if in us, through us.

3. Flow

I think that sometimes people are put off Christianity, because it sounds like ... well, hard work. I think often *Christians* are put off Christianity, because it sounds like hard work!

The bar is set quite high: Jesus tells us we need to be perfect. Oh. There are a lot of things, some of which sound fun, which we're told are not for us. And were told there are virtues to aspire to here – selflessness, love of others before self and self-sacrifice, some restraint, humility – well, these are commendable but more than a little daunting.

In short, this sounds very praiseworthy, but hard work.

However, the promise is that we find the best self we can be by not putting self first, that we find the greatest peace by surrendering our restless wills to God, that in living a life of giving, and love, we receive far more. It does not seem like this adds up, because it sounds like endless effort and giving, and so it is ... unless we are also continually receiving, from the Holy Spirit.

If my life is a like one bottle of fine malt whisky, that I am trying to make last, I will be very loathe to pass it around a room full of others. Look, I only have so much love to give; only so much energy, good-will; if I just give it all away, what will be left for me? So, I eke it out, only pouring miserly sips of myself, and especially not too much into the glasses of others.

But if my life is instead like being connected to a whole barrel, with an open tap that never shuts off nor reduces in pressure, I can live more abundantly.

Or again, we are not Duracell batteries, which must be very careful not to let themselves be drained too fast, because when it's gone, it's gone: no, we are connected to the grid, with the power flowing, to us, through us.

That is the picture of the Holy Spirit: those who believe are connected to the mains, the power – or the water, pick your picture – flowing.

If that is not the reality, then Christianity will indeed be very hard work. I cannot be as God wants me to be, by myself. I'm just not like that, yet. If I have to do it all by an effort of will, it's exhausting, and I simply fail. But here's the good news of Pentecost: that isn't what's expected, and it's not how it works. I'm meant to be plugged in, logged on, connected to the source, with God flowing into me, and through me. That's how it's meant to work.

4. In Flow

Some psychologists now use a term for describing what happens when people are functioning freely, to their best of their ability, all systems firing as they should. They call it being "in flow".

When Rafael Nadal runs hard to his left, and in one fluid motion reaches for the ball and delivers a perfect topspin backhand – feet, legs, back, arm, wrist, hand, all coordinating perfectly at top speed – he is in flow. When a jazz pianist plays a cascade of notes that were once the tune and are now a brilliant improvisation around it – which she has not quite planned, and yet can somehow see as she invents them – she is in flow. When we multi-task at work, and it's challenging, but we know what we are doing, and we keep all the balls in the air, and we do what must be done, and do a good job, we are in flow.

But when you can't hit a tennis shot into court to save your life – its all going wrong; and when you cannot even play the notes on the keyboard that are on the page in front of you; and when nothing is working, and you feel out of sorts with yourself and everyone around you in the office ... you are not in flow.

Being a Christian is not meant to be endless effort without help, pouring out a limited supply of energy we feel we have, without hope of replenishment. We can only do this by being in flow, and this flow involves connection to the source.

So, if we do not feel life is like this, or not enough, is it the *connection* we need to work on?

Am I taking the time, even a little time, to ensure that I am hooked up – that my battery is sometimes on charge, that the hosepipe is actually connected to the tap?

Yes, I am talking about prayer ... but not in an “I SHOULD PRAY” way, which is back to the *duty, it’s all so difficult* approach, but just a being still, available, open to God, a little.

Imagine buying a hose reel from B and Q, and then a month later taking it back.

“It doesn’t work”, I say.

“Oh, I’m sorry”, says the nice B and Q sales assistant. “What’s the problem?”

“What’s the problem?!” I repeat. “It doesn’t work. There’s no water coming out of it!”

“But,” says the B and Q lady, “You don’t seem to have unwrapped the connector; have you attached the hose to your tap?”

“Oh”, I say. “Sorry. What is it I need to do again?”

Well, obviously, that would be silly. No one would complain that a hose did not work without connecting it to the water supply.

This Christianity business, if it feels a little dry – well are we, at least sometimes consciously connecting ourselves, being quiet and pen before God, giving a chance for the flow to... flow?

Connection might be ...

When I wake up; 30 seconds of Come, Holy Spirit.

Or when I go to bed.

Or moments in the day.

But finding some space just to be open to the possibility God really is God, and is here, waiting to fill me, flow through me, if I’ll let myself be connected.

CONCLUSION: When the day of Pentecost had come ...

So, let’s try again:

A reading from the Acts of the Apostles of Brancepeth:

And when the day of Pentecost had come, they – that is, the Christians of Brancepeth – they were all together in one place. And gently from heaven there

came ... the love, joy and peace of God, as those Christians asked God to fill them, flow through them, and waited for him to do that.

Not many spoke in Italian or Urdu or Gaelic ... but the Spirit gave them other gifts, the ones they needed to share the love of God where they were, here, now.

Pause ...

Let us then pray for the Spirit:

Sing:

Come Holy Spirit.

Come Holy Spirit.

Maranatha.

Come Lord come. X 2