

*Mission Area Holy Communion – Festival of Pentecost
23/05/2021
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May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O God our Father.

'I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own, but will speak whatever he hears, and he will declare to you the things that are to come...' (John 16:12-13)

The passages of scripture that we have heard today, I believe, are texts for this moment. They are not resigned to the dusty scrolls of the early church or read out on a Sunday morning simply to be forgotten until next year, but living and breathing, calling us to attempt to understand our time, this time...inside of God's time. They are calling us to life together into what Willie Jennings calls, a '*revolutionary intimacy.*'

The possibilities of life together, of a revolutionary intimacy, feel almost ridiculous to even attempt to conceive right now. The simple idea of having a life together that is strong enough to reorder our common humanity against the strong winds of the pandemic, the dangers of nationalism, the horror of racial segregation, the sin of sexism, and the pain of class and immigration discrimination feels so out of reach it doesn't even feel worth considering.

However, I'm talking about a revolutionary intimacy today because what we see in the truth of the Gospel reading, echoed in Acts chapter 2, at Pentecost, is *worth* considering. For, despite our despair, God is strong enough to bring us into common life, into a common humanity...and that is the dilemma we face as churches and as individuals; coming to grips with the situation of what we believe God is constantly unveiling and bringing about in the world. Something that is worth considering. A vision of love and life together.

I'm talking about the kind of love and life that hasn't fully taken hold yet in the world, the love that asks us to take risks, the love that came in flesh and blood, the love that releases the prisoners and lets the oppressed go free. The love that often we cannot see. The love that is here for eternity.

The thing about this love, is that it is so revolutionary, so world altering that we have struggled to grasp this kind of intimacy in the past, and we struggle as

churches and communities now. The action of God at Pentecost reveals this world altering love in a new situation, a situation that probably scares us a bit, that some of us, myself included, often find it hard to visualise or believe. It's a kind of love that is not a triumphal event but is no less unnerving, because it is the assertive action of the Holy Spirit coming down, creating a new reality of the church, designed for the Kingdom to come.

This struggle is first created by the life of God in human flesh, and it is the struggle that we take on from Ascension Day and continue to try to establish as a church today and everyday. After the resurrection and ascension, at Pentecost we are called upon to enter Jesus' life as our life, to receive our existence through him, with him, in him.

This is the work of the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit is uncontrollable and we can see that in the words of the Responsory that we said earlier. It prods us, pokes us and moves us to this new order that Jesus began, not as individuals but as closer to one another, drawing us sometimes to others that we don't want to or are afraid of drawing close to. The Spirit calls us to enter into the struggle of life and love through God's life and love and we are challenged, and like the disciples at Pentecost often we are unnerved and afraid.

So, what is this challenge then?

I believe, that the Holy Spirit in Acts 2 challenges our fantasies of power, replacing it with God's fantasy of desire, of love and life together. And it is the Holy Spirit that creates something startling where the followers of Jesus are being connected in a way that they were often so wary of in Jesus' ministry on earth, through intimacy, through crowds and through others joining in. The disciples were the chosen but they weren't part of a special club and they didn't receive special privileges...yes, they were physically close to Jesus, but what we see after the Ascension and the work of the Spirit at Pentecost, is that we are all intimate with God, we are all equal in Christ.

What we witness in Acts 2 is God giving wisdom to people that the disciples couldn't control or plan for, it was given in the most intimate of spaces. Of voice, memory, sound, body, land, place, home – my people, my existence, my mother tongue, my life. This movement of the Holy Spirit into many voices and bodies is the unfolding of God's divine fantasy where no matter you come from, what you look like, the spaces you occupy, the body that you live within, or the love

you feel, you are part of the revolutionary intimacy. This is the challenge of love and life together, this is the Gospel.

And the miracle of Pentecost calls us to not just take this in but to declare this revolutionary intimacy by going out, establishing a church, an ecclesia. As I said, these texts are for this moment and here is my challenge to you, to us – how do we imagine the mission of the church when we return and listen again to the tongues and voices proclaiming God, proclaiming love and life together?

Acts 2, verses 4-8, is the epicentre of this revolution and I think it is worth starting to reacquaint ourselves with this passage.

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?"

These verses are understood in many commentaries to be the defining moment of the early church. The beginning of a community without Jesus as flesh but Jesus as Christ, as The Triune God. This a community just like us sitting here today, but broken open by the sheer act of God – and it is in the breaking open, in the risk and the fear and language that the community is created. It is this risk, and its corresponding responsibility and accountability where we are called as a church to tell, to proclaim, to evangelise that another way of loving and living in community is possible.

If we are to do mission as a Mission Area, if we are to offer another option of what the love of God looks like and feels like then maybe we need to be less afraid of our own voices, less tentative of our faith and see how the Holy Spirit can work through our own tongues and mouths and words and actions. Maybe we need to say the Apostles Creed, listening for those words and being proud that it's what we wrestle with and believe, maybe we need to pray more together in meetings, maybe we need to be more intentional when we drop items off at the food bank, maybe we need to relearn how to take risks and talk about our faith so that renews and empowers the communities around us...because the Holy Spirit can change things but we need to have the courage to allow this to happen – we need to learn and relearn our own language of evangelism, of the kind of love that is not embarrassing or you feel you need to apologise for, so we can say yes, God is here and we do not and should not and cannot, control that.

The Spirit defies order and control and physics and power. No structure is safe from the wind and the fire and nothing is beyond its touch. And this display of divine power signals the coming of the Spirit in the reality of human life. This is not what the disciples wanted or were praying to God for, we see that in their bewilderment and questioning...and yet it came and they were faced with it and it was hard. This is the Holy Spirit on God's terms, not confined by human power of who we like, or church buildings or episcopal oversight but by God, waiting in silence and then touching and taking hold of tongue, mouth, breath, mind, heart and body. This is the Holy Spirit that draws people closer to who they really are, the language of their mothers and of their insides. It is the language of love and life together, the language of revolutionary intimacy that as a church we are called to be.

Just imagine what our churches and our Mission Area could look like if we were prepared to go out...renewed, refreshed and equipped, and let the fire of the Spirit in...

Amen.