

## **Pentecost – Whit Sunday**

*When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. <sup>2</sup>Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. <sup>3</sup>They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. <sup>4</sup>All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them. (Acts 2:1-4)*

I think Whit Sunday or Pentecost is the most exciting festival of the Christian year. It might not be considered the most important – Easter and Christmas definitely rank above Pentecost in terms of our obligations to attend. It's not even marked with a bank holiday any more, falling as it does fifty days after Easter and Easter being a moveable feast. This year it does coincide with the late Spring Bank Holiday, though, of course, we can forget any going out into the streets and processing. While those traditions aren't quite as lively now as it was, Whit walks and social distancing certainly don't go together. Singing festivals were what marked Whitsuntide in Wales as I was growing up but they've also had to be deferred this year. Celebrations are definitely off this year but that's not to say that we can't still be part of the excitement of Pentecost, because I think that's what this festival is all about – participation.

At Pentecost we celebrate the moment when some very ordinary people stopped being observers, stopped waiting for something to happen, stopped wondering what everything was all about because, all of a sudden they were given their place in the story. Luke gives a graphic description of what happened to the followers of Jesus, holed up in a room in Jerusalem. Some of them probably had having been there for the best part of fifty days, afraid to go out more than was strictly necessary. We know what that feels like this year. Then suddenly something happened to them. They were given a gift – a gift that filled their whole being and gave them skills that they'd never known before. Then, with those skills, they found a purpose. They could now share the story of the living God with the whole world, because they themselves were filled with the Spirit of God. They were part of the story.

We too can be part of the story. At the moment we're in a time of waiting. We're waiting for the time when our church buildings will reopen, wondering what restrictions we'll have to implement when they do. We're waiting for a new vicar, wondering what he'll be like. He's waiting to move up to Cheshire, probably wondering about the welcome he'll receive from his new congregation. As we sit and wait it's easy to forget that the gift of the Holy Spirit has been promised to all of those who follow Jesus. It might not come in rushing wind and tongues of fire but it is promised to us as much as to the first disciples.

The question is whether we can accept the unpredictability because the message of Pentecost is not only that the Holy Spirit can come into ordinary people but that it also brings change.. Our tendency is to look for safety and stability in our lives including in our church life. If we're to be fully open to the Spirit we also have to accept that we may be moved to do things differently. Can we see that as exciting and energising? I hope so.

So this Sunday, let us pray that we can be given the gifts which will move us to be part of that story which is the gospel of Christ. Accepting the changes which may be ahead of us and rejoicing in the excitement of Pentecost may we say Come, Holy Spirit, come. Amen