

Pentecost

June 5th 2022

Introduction

My instinct when we read this kind of story,

The story of winds of fire, and violent wind coming down on the gathered on the disciples, is that this seems the kind of festival that other Christians might enjoy, but for us presbyterians, no thank you.

I think most of us would have loved to have been present at Christmas,
Epiphany with the wise men and the stars
The Ascension with Jesus going up to heaven would have been remarkable
Good Friday would have been terrible to be a part of
But if meant also being present to Easter Sunday, then we would have loved to share in the joy of that day.

But Pentecost seems to scarily out there.

And yet we totally need Pentecost,
I want to say how do we get Pentecost without becoming Pentecostal
But we need Pentecost,
There is no such thing as a non-Pentecostal Christian
And if we need shaken by this, then may we be shaken by the Spirit

This is how the Spirit comes

The wind is violent, shaking, scary
The tongues are fiery, fierce, passionate,
It feels like Pentecost goes beyond our tolerance for adventure
And fire,

And it feels like, how do we put this, it just doesn't feel very respectable
And it doesn't feel at controlled.

And for us in the Presbyterian part of the Church
Where worship is ordered,
We do not much like worship with multiple tongues and going out onto the street
And people laughing at us because we are so out of control that they believe we are drunk.

Pentecost seems something that we want to leave to other Christians.

Can we not leave Pentecost to the Pentecostals?

Meanwhile we will sit in our pews, sing our metrical psalms and whilst we might be accused of being slightly detached, or even dull at times, no one will ever accuse us of being drunk.

But we need this Pentecostalism
So we do not domesticate God
So that our faith does contain miracles
That our boundaries and barriers are broken
And our speech and our being proclaims that Jesus is risen
And that we learn how to love

I may not be a Pentecostal, but I do yearn for this,
I love it, the power of it, the diversity of it, the transformation of it
The Italians the Moroccans and the Iraqis, and I would just love if it there was just one Scot
there,
Singing, rejoicing, unbounded.

And so with this story, the temptation is to say something like
“We need more of the Holy Spirit” as if this is something we can conjure up
But instead feel for the yearning of it,
And pray for it,
Come Holy Spirit, Come Holy Spirit, Come Holy Spirit.

[Pentecost Recap](#)

Let us look at this story....

The believers are gathered in one place,

And they have been praying,
And if they have been obeying Jesus
They have been praying for the Holy Spirit,
When suddenly a great rushing wind and flames like tongues of fire come on to them

Then they go out onto the street
Now this is the time of a major festival in Jerusalem, people are gathered in Jerusalem from
all round the ancient world for the festival of Harvest Firstfruits – one of the three great
gathering times for Jews at that time.

And the apostles are speaking
And everyone hears in their own language.

This scene is so outrageous and miraculous that some are amazed and ask themselves
“What does this mean?”

And it is into this throng, this multinational throng
A perfect stage
That the apostles begin to speak, or the apostle are there
But it is Peter, runaway, failure Peter, inconsistent leader Peter
He is the one who stands up to speak
And when he does he speaks **Boldly.**

Whilst others accuse the believers of being drunk.

It is at this point that Peter, remember Peter, the last time we saw him in Jerusalem was when he denying Jesus, now he stands publicly, and speaks boldly – the Greek is especially emphatic on how bold Peter’s speech is, and he begins to say

“We are not drunk”

What you are seeing now, is what the prophet Joel once spoke of, and then he quotes Joel

‘On the last days, I will pour my Spirit on all flesh,
Your Sons and your daughters will see visions
Your young men and old men shall dream dreams
Even on **my** male slaves and **my** female slaves
Even they shall be saved.

....

The sun shall be darkened
The moon shall turn to blood
Before the coming day of the Lord

And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.”

And Peter goes on to speak of the resurrection of Jesus, Many believe and are saved.

What shall we say of this...

Ordinary People

Firstly we shall say that it happened to ordinary men and women like us, who were inspired by God to do extraordinary things, to overcome their fear, to speak that which they had previously denied, to see how their lives and the life of Jesus had already been foreseen in the words of scripture, and they spoke about this with such remarkable power that many thousands of people turned to the new faith, or in the words of Luke – they were saved.

Through God’s power in ordinary people
We might go further and say, through God’s power in broken and failed people
Many others were saved.

Pentecost is not for the religious success stories
It is for the failures
It is for the frightened
It is for the kind of people who have never done that kind of thing before.
It is for though the people who yearn

And more than that, that this act encompasses many different kinds of ordinary people
Ordinary people in all their diversity
First of all that big list of different ethnicities – Medes, people from Cyrene, Cappodoccians,
Iraqis, North Africans
Romans and Arabs
Those born Jews, those who have converted.

Because ordinary people are very diverse,
There is no such thing as one ordinary person
Everyone is quirky, everyone is different flavoured, has their own take on what it is to be
human.

This litany of inclusion follows
Across lines of gender – your sons and your daughters will see visions
Across lines of age – your young men and your old men will dream dreams
Across lines of economic power – my male slaves and female slaves will prophesy

There is no kind of ordinary which escapes

This does not come to the Pentecostals alone,
This is a festival for the Presbyterians, the Anglicans, the Methodists, the Catholics

In showing this diversity, this story is saying
This story has to be for us
No matter our background
It is for us
And we stay us – we still get to speak the same language
But we are transformed to be able to speak of the great things of God,
To live the great things of God.

This is for us all.
So let us yearn
Come Holy Spirit
Come Holy Spirit
Come Holy Spirit

Public Event

The second thing we shall say is that this does not happen in Church or a Synagogue
That it happens on the street.

There is a remarkable public act here of coming together.

This is about God – whose Spirit flew over all creation at the beginning of time, flying in a
new way over all flesh and all creation.

And this means the arena of the public and the arena of the holy.

There are two illustrations of this I would like to give.

The first comes from 1994, when South Africa was getting ready to have its first elections after the release of Nelson Mandela and the ending of Apartheid.

Desmond Tutu wrote about this time as being like a roller coaster – there moments of great hope when Mandela was released, or when the government and the ANC reached agreement on the new constitution. But there were also moments when it seemed almost certain that everything good would be destroyed.

There was huge infighting between the ANC and the Inkatha Freedom party
And a right wing militia led by Eugene Terre Blanche threatened an armed revolution.

But said Tutu, a miracle happened,
The right wing militia were defeated
And the Inkatha Freedom Party decided to join the process.

And when the elections happened, when people earned status marks by saying “I queued for four hours to vote” or “I queued for six hours to vote”.

This was a miracle, and to Desmond Tutu, this was a spiritual event
Political and spiritual.

The Spirit moves to change the public, the life of the people in the street.

Let me give another example.

On Sunday morning on BBC Breakfast a group of folks from Aberfeldy gathered in the square to talk about the way that Ukrainians had been welcome to Highland Perthshire – there were Ukrainians women and children talking about their lives being changed, there was Gavin Price talking about the vision which he had – note that word vision and there were quilters talking about the quilts that they were making to welcome Ukrainian children, specifically made to remind them of things that they had left behind and would one day come back to.

I was struck when Gavin used the word – vision – because that is the same word that is used in Pentecost.

And I thought to myself – surely this too, this place of welcome and safety, crossing boundaries of nation, and class, and gender and age – surely this is of the Spirit, how can it not be.

So this is faith in the public place
Not closeted in a religious building
So yearn for this
Yearn for this

Come Holy Spirit
Come Holy Spirit

Strangeness and Loss

The final thing I would like to say that this is a story of strangeness and loss

Did you notice the way that Peter talked about the Sun turning dark
Suns are meant to shine
Suns that are turned dark are inverted and disconcertingly different in their function
This is not the way that things are meant to be.

And then did you see that the moon was turned to blood,
That this too is very scary
This is about our fear being projected onto the night sky.

You see that thing that hold us back from the Spirit is not so much our Presbyterianism, or
our respectability
It is our fear.
It is our fear of loss of control
It is our fear of strangeness
It is our fear of the world being inverted

But the world was never changed for the good by things staying the same, for things staying
respectable.

I think that the sun darkening and the moon turning blood red is to tell us that this will be
sometimes something that will take us well outside of our comfort zone.
But where outside of our comfort zone is always where the magic happens.

I think that we have to ask God to take us to the place where the Spirit leads,
To tell us that we are little bit brave, but would like to be a bit braver
And to have discernment where exactly that might be,
What street, what language are we to speak?

Jesus once told us, in Luke 11:13, that the Father would give the Holy Spirit to those who ask
it
So let us do that this morning
Let us ask God to send his Spirit
Let us go onto our knees and ask for the Spirit to be sent to us again in Weem
Let us ask and let us wait
And then let us see what God will do with us.

In our ordinary diversity
Onto the streets and public places of our world
Into the place where everything is turned upside down

Come Holy Spirit

Come Holy Spirit
Come Holy Spirit

AMEN