

## SERMON PENTECOST MAY 23<sup>rd</sup> 2021

Last Friday morning, I was lying in bed at 6.30 am, pondering this truly dramatic passage of Pentecost. Because have no doubt, this is a pivotal moment in human history. It's the day that the Church of Christ is birthed and launched as a movement that will change the shape of civilisation. This is what we celebrate today.

So as I'm lying-in bed, I thought I want to start my sermon with something that captures the thrilling nature of all that's taking place on this day. Where all the people from all the nations are gathered.

This whole Pentecost scene is just such a cacophony of sight and sound. Just listen to the words used to describe the scene...

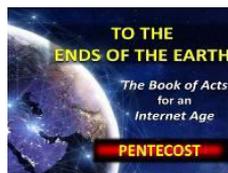
**Suddenly a sound from heaven like a roaring mighty windstorm - flames like tongues of fire appeared - everyone present filled with the Holy Spirit - speaking in other languages about the wonderful things God has done - People from every nation heard the loud noise, everyone came running, - they were bewildered, amazed perplexed. How can this Be? What can this mean?**

So as I lay there in my bed, I thought... "How can I capture the chaotic excitement and the urgency of all this, other than just saying it?"

And just as I was thinking this very thought, at 6.30 am in sleepy Epsom, my good wife Kim put on one of her favourite pieces of music, and when I say put it on, I mean, LOUD AS. It shook the rafters of the Vicarage. But when I heard it, I thought "THAT'S IT" ... this is Pentecost put to music. So let's hear it, and imagine that scene of Pentecost. The flames - the wind - everyone running - bewildered and amazed. But I warn you, I've pumped up the volume.

**PLAY VIVALDI'S STORM**

**THEN THIS SLIDE**



Why this music? Because its dramatic, urgent, and stirring. And this is Pentecost. Pentecost is when God dramatically announces that a new way, a new epoch, a new age is breaking in. And its urgent and its stirring.

At Pentecost, God announces through the refining power of fire, that a mighty change is blowing in the wind. That despite our differences of language, race, and culture. God is bringing humanity together in a new understanding,

Believers filled with the Holy Spirit spoke about the wonderful things God is doing, in a language they didn't know they were speaking, but people from every nation on earth, understood what they were saying. It was breakthrough moment in human

understanding through the power of God's Spirit. And It provoked startled questions, **"How can this be, and what does this mean"?**

**So let's ask that same question.**

**What does this mean for us and the Church for the times in which we now live.**

Because we live in urgent times and the call for the church to be truly the language of 'Good news' is an urgent one. There's no question that the arrival of the Internet age has catapulted humanity into a new way of being. A new epoch, a new age.

NEVER in this history of humanity have we lived in a world so connected as now. At our fingertips is the worldwide web. The planetary nervous system.

**And there's no doubt for me, that that the world-wide web is a gift. But like all good gifts it can be used or abused. A power to heal or a power to harm.**

**How do we the Church play a role in this gift.**

**How do we speak about the wonderful things God is doing, BUT in a language that people will understand.**

I think most of us can recognise that in this unprecedented gift of connectedness, humanity has a glorious opportunity to leave behind the tribal mindset that has caused so much pain down the centuries. The tribal mindset that means we fear difference. Where we are suspicious of 'otherness' in whatever shape or form 'otherness' appears. Where we distrust the 'strangeness' of the stranger.

But the internet has the power to change this. Because now every corner of the globe is in our mobile phones. We literally have the whole world in our hands at any given time. So when we see images like this



**AND THIS**



Which are for more accessible and visible now... doesn't this jolt and remind all of us of our ONE common shared humanity, made in the image of God? Doesn't the gift of the Internet show us, that even in all our God given diversity and differences, we have more that unites us, than should *ever* divide us.

But of course, we also see the potential for harm. Social media 'echo chambers' show us clearly that this tribal mindset is still alive and kicking. **In our echo chambers, we gather with those who think like us, believe like us, and of course are always RIGHT, just like us.**

The tribal stirs the beast within all of us, to turn another human being, into a 'them'. And in the process make it so much easier to dehumanise 'them'.



**So how important is that, that we the Church show a different way.**

**That we proclaim and live out live the good news of Pentecost, for these times?**

Where the Spirit is poured out on all people, to break down the barriers of language and race that so often divide and diminish us. How can we be the hands, feet, and the voice of Christ for these times?

The voice that heals and reconciles through the ways of Christ's love.

As Jesus said to the woman at the well... **'Believe me, a time is coming when all human and religious constructs that separate us from each other, will cease to have meaning. Because what God wants, is a people who worship in Spirit and in the truth of love'**.

When we the Church speak the language and the Spirit of this Christ love, I believe we speak the good news in a way that all people can understand.

But we all need encouragement for these times, and I'm a great believer in feeding our souls by looking around and seeing where we see the Spirit is at work in people's hearts and lives. And there's so much of this taking place here in Aotearoa NZ Zealand, in so many different ways.



As an Englishman coming here 10 year ago, I was quickly made aware of the Bi Cultural journey and the deep hurts and the deep wounds.

I've got to know and hear all the different perspectives, from all sides.

But within all the perspectives (and the problems that still exist) ... what's been inspiring for me, is to see just how clearly the Holy Spirit is at work in this country, to bring about healing and reconciliation.

So many people of all ages are learning the language of Te Reo, learning about Maori culture. For someone like me who stumbles around in the language, it inspires me to try and make progress for a deeper understanding.

But what I see that really encourages, is when the Spirit of humility is present in all people, from all cultures, from all perspectives, recognising that in our diversity and difference there is a gift to be found. We can all learn something about ourselves, from each other.



But what this day of Pentecost most does for I guess ... is to make me reflect on just how powerfully the Holy Spirit has been at work in my life.

And if there's one verse of scripture that captures how I've seen the Spirit at work in my life and in the life of others... it's got to be **John 3:8** "The wind blows wherever it wants. Just as you can hear the wind but can't tell where it comes from or where it is going, so you can't explain how people are born of the Spirit."

The biggest mistake we can make about the Holy Spirit, is to try and box the Spirit in or tame the Spirit. As I said last week, The Spirit will always dance in places it was thought no dancing is allowed.

And for anyone who doesn't know my story, **I was born of the Spirit** and came to faith, in way that's probably a bit unusual. And it can freak some Christians out because its not the way it's supposed to be.

Because I wasn't a Christian, didn't know anything about Christianity, I didn't go to Church ... and then at the very lowest point of my life, literally breaking point, I prayed out loud ... ***Dear God please help me, I have nowhere else to go and I have nothing left to offer.***

I didn't mention Jesus, why would I? Christianity didn't figure anywhere on my radar. So no 4 Spiritual laws, just my broken spirit, crying out to the Spirit of my Creator, Maker, Father God.

And just Like Elijah in the cave, God didn't meet me in the earthquake or Pentecostal wind or fire. God came to me, as the gentle whisper. The Still small voice of calm. But I knew in the depths of my being that this was the Spirit of God speaking beyond the confines of my human language, in a tongue I could understand.

Understandably, this beginning, has shaped and informed, every aspect of how I now understand the work of the Holy Spirit.

**Sometimes we can't miss the Spirit.**

**Sometimes, we have to open ourselves up to the Spirit.**

**And sometimes, we have to open our eyes, to see the Spirit at work in the world all around us.**

But whatever our age and whatever the stage of life we are in ... it's never too late to dream dreams of a different way of being, and to grow in the love, grace and wisdom of Christ. To see more than we already see, so that we become more than we already are.