

NIGEL RODE Sermon. 8<sup>th</sup> June 2014 Pentecost  
Num 11:24-30 Acts 2: 1-21; John 7:37-39

Since Easter we have been growing in understanding the meaning of those events and where they might lead. It has been rather like a smouldering fire that now bursts into flames, as :

“Suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where the disciples were sitting and divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them.”

It conjures a wonderful picture, but we have to set it in context.

The disciples had already experienced the risen Christ appearing among them and filling them first with peace, happiness and re-assurance and then commissioning them to spread the good news – but before doing so, they were to wait in Jerusalem until they were empowered to do so. Now today, the day of Pentecost, was to be that day.

Pentecost, the 50<sup>th</sup> day after the Passover was, for the first century Jew, an agricultural festival when farmers would bring to Jerusalem the first sheaf of wheat from the crop and offer it to God, partly as a sign of gratitude and partly as a prayer that all the rest of the crop would be safely gathered in. Pentecost was also the day that the Jews recalled when their ancestors, having passed through the Red Sea on the Exodus, arrived at Mount Sinai and Moses’ received the law from God; it was a celebration of God giving to his redeemed people the way of life by which they must now carry out his purposes.

So, here at Pentecost, we have God and the ascended Jesus, capitalising on the established events in the Jewish calendar and taking the occasion to bring about what has been promised. For in these last weeks since Easter we have frequently heard that the risen Jesus would not leave his disciples, but that he would be with them even unto the ends of the earth; but how was he was to do this now he had ascended into heaven to sit at the right hand of God?

Well, he had told his disciples that he would send the Holy Spirit upon them. The Holy Spirit, being the third part of our triune God (Father, Son and Holy Spirit). And now 50 days after the Passover, and just 10 days after his Ascension to Heaven, Jesus is keeping his promise to the disciples, when with a sound like rushing wind, divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested

on each of them, anointing and filling them with the Holy Spirit. This wonderful picture and also other reference to the Holy Spirit being described as a peaceful dove, are all attempts to describe the indescribable, and explain the inexplicable.

The image of the mighty wind shows us that the Holy Spirit brings dynamic power, provided that we are ready to receive it! Without the aid of the Spirit, we are powerless. How often do we feel powerless to do what we want to do, or what we know we ought to do?

The disciples, having been filled with the Spirit, knew what they should do, and now felt empowered to carry out the commission that Jesus had given them. They went out into the city of Jerusalem, where people from many surrounding cities and countries had gathered for the Pentecost festivities, and they started to tell of God's deeds of power. The amazing thing was that, despite the large array of nationalities and languages, each person heard the news in his own native tongue but this caused a response from some of the crowd that the apostles were drunk!

Peter addressed the crowds denying that the men were drunk at 9 in the morning, reminding them that God's giving of the Spirit on all who believed had been prophesied by Joel. He went on to say that the Spirit would be poured out on all men and women, regardless of class, from one generation to the next, so that everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.

It was an extraordinary occasion for the whole nation of Israel, if they would only recognise it. In a sense it was the day when the new Israel was born. From now on the bright revelation of God's reality, power and mercy, sown in the promise to Abraham and his family, spreading to the chosen nation who were called to be God's light, will be available to the whole world; all believers will be part of that holy nation, filled with the life of the living God, or as in the Gospel according to St John that we heard this morning, will be filled with rivers of living water. John records how Jesus referred to scripture, possibly that section of Ezekiel where he has a great vision of the temple and Jerusalem wonderfully restored after the exile and describes how a new river will flow from under the temple threshold; it will get deeper and deeper and will make its way to the Dead Sea, which it will make fresh so that fish will swim in it and wonderful fruit trees will grow around it.

In this reference, instead of a new city and temple, Jesus is suggesting that the promise will be fulfilled in individual human beings. Jesus is inviting anyone, anyone at all, who wants to have the water of life bubbling up inside them and flowing out to a world around.

This imagery reminds us also of the story of the Woman at the Well when Jesus said to her “Everyone who drinks of the water from the well, will get thirsty again – but anyone who drinks the water I give them won’t ever be thirsty again. For the water I’ll give them will become a spring of water welling up to eternal life.”

In using the image of water, Jesus was speaking about the Holy Spirit – anyone who believes in Him is promised that Spirit – God’s refreshing presence will come to live with them.

Pentecost was only the beginning. It was not only to those first disciples that God came intimately and completely in the Holy Spirit. There is plenty of it left for us!!

Freshly and vigorously in our times, too, God is prepared to make his dwelling with expectant believers. It is a terrible myth that the Holy Spirit is only for some, that any are shut off from the water of life, that inner God-given life.

The promise is simple; anyone at all who prays, expectantly and longingly for the real, living God to come upon them in power will receive the gift that God longs to give.

Let’s not get too worked up about the ‘when’ or ‘how’, be it wind or tongues of flame; that is God’s agenda, but we can trust that it will always be in the time and way that is best for each person who asks.

Amen