

When the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all together in one place and...and I could carry on with those words from Acts we have just read, because I have known them off by heart since I was a teenage schoolgirl and my Scripture teacher – and it was called scripture not R.E. in those days – made us commit certain prayers and Bible passages to memory, with detention if you couldn't write it all out word for word in the lesson after the homework was set.

At the time it seemed a very odd passage to have to learn – in those days when bishops and theologians were explaining anything supernatural as pre-scientific ignorance. Everything supernatural in the Bible was given natural explanations – the 5000 were fed because all those who had food with them shared it and no-one noticed that was what had happened – Jesus seemed to walk on the water because there was a sandbar in the lake that the fishermen didn't know about; and so on.. Our teacher never revealed why she thought **this** particular Bible story so important, beyond saying that Pentecost – or Whitsunday as it used to be known - was one of the three major festivals of the Christian year

So, all this – about tongues of fire on the disciples' heads - I found myself explaining to a class of teenagers some 10 years later as picture language, like us saying someone's face lit up. Because I really had no idea of who the Holy Spirit was; or how this strange story could have any personal relevance for me or anyone else, even if it **was** historical fact.

And then, in the 1960s, all over the place surprising things began to happen – and it was like wildfire that just erupts independently in a hundred different places – and begins to spread. Here the gift of healing was happening. There people were writing new worship songs. In New York, violent gang members were coming to know Christ. Books – that are still on my bookshelf – were appearing...Nine O'clock in the morning, the Cross and the switchblade, So your wife came home speaking in tongues. So did mine. Suddenly many, many Christians were becoming aware of and experiencing the Holy Spirit in gentle and dramatic ways ...both those who had been faithfully praying for such a revival or renewal - and those, like me, who knew nothing of such things and for whom the Spirit had been just a word I'd not really taken much notice of till then.

We read the books, went to hear speakers at renewal conferences, studied the book of Acts with new eyes and real excitement – until half of our church fellowship got to the point of saying “Why do you keep bringing the Holy Spirit into everything?” and the other half replied ““Because He **is** involved in everything. The whole New Testament – and a great deal of the Old Testament for that matter – is about the Spirit”. And our wise priest, who was one of those not so caught up in this revival, advised that those who were, met additionally on another evening to wait on God and explore the gifts of the Holy Spirit, the charisms from which this charismatic renewal got its name. So, we did,... a Bible, an English Hymnal – and a mug of coffee in each of our hands and no idea what to do . **None** of us in the room had ever prayed out loud with others, without carefully prepared words to read out from a prayer book or service sheet. “Well I suppose we'd better begin by asking the Holy Spirit to lead us” someone said. And we did. Someone may have opened their Bible and read a psalm or something like that or suggested a hymn – and then someone just prayed. And all of us

were at one and so totally caught up in it, that more prayer followed seamlessly from one person to another...and before we knew it an hour of deep engagement in prayer had passed. And we were all amazed at how natural every one of us had found it, as if we had been praying unselfconsciously together all our lives. We hadn't struggled to think of what to pray about or what words to use – they had just come to us as if this were any other conversation we were having, but with God and all of us together,

Nowadays, I think most of take for granted praying with other people, without set prayers as normal, as well as appreciating and using words others have written that express what we want to say to God. We expect to sing new songs of worship as well as old. And few of us doubt the Spirit's power to move mountains – and to heal - and to enable us to know what God is saying to us whether through the words of scripture or through words or pictures that come into our minds – or through dreams – through the words of others or through circumstances and events. We have learned that with God nothing is impossible. And that the Spirit **is** poured out on **everyone** who calls on the name of the Lord – young and old, female and male – as it says in the words of Joel that Peter quoted on the day of Pentecost.

That first outpouring came after many days of those first believers – some 120 men and women we are told – intentionally waiting on God, following Jesus' ascension ... and his original eleven disciples and the women constantly being all together in one place, poring over the ancient writings of those to whom God had spoken in the past – and praying. And it was when they were all together in one place , that suddenly the Spirit came on them - and the church was born. – with that dramatic jump in the number of believers – so many that they found it hard to cope with teaching the new Christians and helping everyone to be included and have a full part in everything as more and more were added to their number. Those who could were having to do things like selling land to provide for the twelve to make preaching the gospel their full time work. While others took on looking after everyone else and smoothing out relationship problems.

This moment is not perhaps the best time to say we too need to be all together in one place, waiting on God and praying! But if we want to see this kind if renewal here ...a person of God's appointment sent to us to lead the church – a new outpouring of the Spirit on us all – God adding daily to our number those He is calling to know Him – and much moreto as it were move from the first chapter of Acts to the end of chapter 2, which I'll read in a minute – we need to be together – virtually if need be - and wait on God together. And I want to restart our Parish Prayer evening on the 2nd Tuesday of each month at 7 pm, here on Zoom for the time being.

What followed that first Day of Pentecost was a church who “ devoted themselves to the apostles teaching and to the fellowship; to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods , they gave to anyone as they had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts .They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favour of all the people . And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

I am not suggesting that we live exactly like that, but that meeting together frequently to worship and pray, and enjoy fellowship is how we keep our faith so vibrant that others are drawn to join us and to know the One who is at the heart of our life together. You, we, are doing well in keeping in touch with each other and those who are not able to join us on Zoom. Our common life is still there. And Jesus is there among us whether it is just 2 or 3 sharing and encouraging one another by phone or online. But if we would see the new life God has waiting for us as a church, we need to keep looking to Him together, in joy and wonder and expectant faith.