The Day of Pentecost

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Readings: Acts 2:1-21, Psalm 104:26-36 , Romans 8;14-17, John 14:8-17

Introduction:

Here we are again on another Day of Pentecost. Why is it called this?

Because Pentecost is the Greek number for 50, and Pentecost falls 50 days after Easter. Why is the colour for this day red? Because of the mention of tongues of fire in the reading from Acts we will listen to. And here is another fun fact. There is a Jewish Festival called Pentecost or Shavuot which also falls at this time. The Christian Pentecost marks the giving of the Holy Spirit to the believers gathered on the day of Pentecost at Jerusalem. It signifies the beginning of what we now call the church.

Point 1:

Now, a little bit of information about the Jewish Feast of Pentecost, also called Shavuot or the Feast of Weeks. It occurs 50 days after the Jewish

Passover, which corresponded to the time that Christ was crucified. Remember Jesus had a passover meal with his disciples shortly before his death. That is why the two festivals overlap. Initially the Jewish Pentecost celebrated the end of the grain harvest, but later morphed into a celebration of the giving of the Torah (the first 5 books of the Old Testament) to Moses at Mount Sinai. This was a very important Jewish festival. It involved thousands of Jewish people gathering in

Jerusalem and travelling there from the countryside.

So, when we read in Acts **when the day of Pentecost had come, and they were all together in one place**, this reference is to the Jewish feast of Pentecost that had resulted in good Jews being in Jerusalem for the feast. Now remember, all the earliest Christians were Jewish, all the disciples were Jewish, so they were gathered for this Jewish festival. But it took a rather abrupt and unexpected turn. It then became what we call the day of Pentecost.

Point 2:

And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages ……. The onlookers were amazed, perplexed, and the cynics and sceptics suggested that they were all drunk. So Peter felt obliged to give an explanation. He said **this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel; 'in the last days it will be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy ……** And Peter continued to proclaim the message of Jesus and many people were convinced. We are told 3000 people were baptised that day. Well, it must have been mayhem and chaos and celebration and wonder and confusion. But in the end it transformed those early christians into a community of faith, led by the Holy Spirit.

Point 3:

And it was the beginning of what we now call the church because from this day onwards the early church literally exploded. Doubting Thomas sets out to preach the message of Christ in southern India and founded the Church of St. Thomas, which exists to this day. Peter goes to Antioch and Rome, spreading the message of Christ throughout Europe. Matthew goes to Syria. John goes to Turkey and Greece. In a short matter of years Christian communities have sprung up all over

Europe and the Middle East. From these beginnings, the message of the gospel even made it to the southern hemisphere and yes, even to us. And all because God decided to do something unexpected yet prophesied about in the Old Testament on the feast of Pentecost.

I often wonder what the average Anglican makes of this account of the day of Pentecost? My sceptic's heart tells me that a number think it a quaint tale. Others may think, I wish our church was more like those early Christians. 3000 baptisms in one day would be a bit much perhaps! So I will tell you what I think happened.

I think that God did manifest something to those people gathered for the feast of Pentecost. What was significant was not the loud wind or tongues of fire, but that these believers knew, beyond a shadow of doubt, that the Holy Spirit had given them power from God to testify to the risen Christ and to worship him and to form an intentional community of faith called the church. Something had been galvanized in their hearts and minds and now they knew for certain that their faith was not mis-guided or delusional but a reality that would determine the direction of the rest of their lives.

That first day of Pentecost was a day of mystery, enthusiasm and power. Mystery because those first christians had the experience of Christ's presence with them in a new and different way. Enthusiasm because things were really beginning to happen with all those tongues and baptisms. And power, because at long last they did not have to rely on their own resources, but had been given the gift of the Holy Spirit, as Jesus had promised, to help them in their work for the kingdom of God and the establishment of christian communities, ie. the church. Recall our gospel reading, when Jesus says to Philip, *And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever. This is the Spirit of truth…..You know him because he abides with you, and he will be in you.*

Conclusion:

The real miracle of the day of Pentecost, is that it is still happening. Over 2000 years after that event at Jerusalem there are still people who are followers of Christ, there is still a church, although manifest in many different forms, there are still people being baptised, and in some parts of the world there are still martyrs. The Holy Spirit Jesus promised is still being poured out upon the earth and in people's lives today. This Holy Spirit lives in each one of us. Now, don't you think that is remarkable.