

Reflection from Revd Ali for *The Day of Pentecost* ~ 23rd May 2021

Our reading from Acts begins with the disciples gathered in the upper room. Jerusalem was crowded that day, the streets packed with Jewish pilgrims who had gathered to celebrate Shavuot, the Festival of Weeks. The festival was held 50 days after the first day of Passover, the fifty days gave the festival its other name, Pentecost.

Once again, Jerusalem was packed with visitors from many countries, all celebrating the festival. The disciples had been told by Jesus, at his Ascension, to return to Jerusalem, to watch and wait. They were to wait for the Advocate, the Counsellor, the gift that Jesus had promised to them. The disciples were gathered together praying, meditating on scripture and praising God, when suddenly there was a sound like a violent wind. But this was not like any other weather event. The sound of the rushing wind filled the entire house where they were waiting. Then it appeared as if divided tongues of fire appeared among them, and rested on each of their heads. The disciples were filled with the power of the Holy Spirit and were empowered to speak to the gathered pilgrims, in language that all the pilgrims understood. The Holy Spirit had transformed the disciples into apostles.

Some of the pilgrims knew the apostles as ordinary men. Men who had regular jobs, but who were now expounding the truth about the Messiah, the Holy One, Jesus Christ. They couldn't understand the change in the disciples so they claimed they were drunk and babbling. It is interesting, how sometimes, when people surprise or amaze us, how quickly we are to dismiss their unforeseen gifts. They hadn't experienced the gift of the Holy Spirit themselves, so they disparage those who had. Peter hears their accusation and calls the crowd to order and then speaks to them in words that they would understand. The words of the prophet Joel (Joel 2: 28) when he had prophesied about the end times. Those who were listening to Peter would have understood the reference. "God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams". Peter was using Joel's words to describe the transformational action of the Holy Spirit. The disciples had been undoubtedly been changed by the time they had spent with Jesus, witnessing his teaching and miracles, but with the gift of the Holy Spirit their transformation was complete. They were now equipped to fulfil the task that God, through God's Son, Jesus Christ, had put on their hearts. During the three years the disciples had spent with Jesus they had witnessed many feats of supernatural power through the person of Jesus. Now, even though Jesus wasn't with them physically, the power of God was still with them through the promised gift of the Holy Spirit. They were empowered and ready to go out and make disciples of all the nations.

We can't see the Holy Spirit, but we can see the results of the *action* of the Holy Spirit. At the beginning of our reading (Acts 2: 2) the Holy Spirit first appeared as a powerful wind. We can't see the wind, but we can understand something of its nature by its action. When we are by water, we can see the way the wind whips up waves. We can feel its chill on our skin. If you drive by the wind farms at Swinford or Lower Spinney you can see its action on massive wind turbines – the blades of which can each weigh up to 50 tons! In the same way we can understand something of the Holy Spirit by seeing the *action* of the Holy Spirit. In our reading, the Holy Spirit is then a visible force, like tongues of fire. Fire that that didn't cause pain or char flesh but did change the disciples. They were changed from simple fishermen, tax collectors or farmers, to apostles. Apostles who could proclaim the truth of the good news about the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ - not just in their mother tongue, but in all the languages of the pilgrims present that day.

Just like fire the Holy Spirit spread. The disciples couldn't help themselves, they had to go out into the street, shouting about Jesus in different languages to a huge multicultural crowd. The Holy Spirit didn't stop there. The pilgrims who heard the disciples speaking to them in their own language had come from all around the Mediterranean. They would then travel to far-flung places after the festival was over, and take with them the story of the amazing things they had seen and

experienced in Jerusalem. They would tell their neighbours about the ordinary guys they had seen speaking in so many languages. They would describe the disciples' enthusiasm and confidence, and they would share the good news that they had heard the disciples proclaim. The Holy Spirit had lit up the disciples, a fire that spread into the streets of Jerusalem, then out into the world. The good news of Jesus Christ began to spread like wildfire.

The power of the Holy Spirit can bring about extraordinary change. By filling the disciples with confidence, strength and the ability to communicate, the Holy Spirit transformed a group of friends into the beginning of a worldwide faith. The Holy Spirit is the wind of change that can breathe new life into us all. The Holy Spirit can inspire and empower us to do things that we never had thought possible. So what does that mean for us today, here in 21st century Corley and Fillongley? Well, the Holy Spirit that filled the disciples 2000 years ago is still in action in the world today. We just have to be prepared to ask for the Holy Spirit to enter into our lives and to allow the Spirit to give us the confidence and the ability to step out in faith and to do the things that only we can do. God has made us all in God's image, we are all unique and special in God's eyes. We all have a call on our lives that has been put there by God, a call that only we can fulfil. Only God and you know what that is. It might not be obvious at the moment, so maybe our Pentecost prayer is for discernment of that call. Maybe that call is something that has been denied or avoided. In that case maybe our Pentecost prayer is for courage. Maybe the call is something that you have tried to do, but have failed, possibly many times. Then maybe our Pentecost prayer is for the tenacity to try again.

Whatever your call is, whatever your prayer is, my prayer for all of us is that we will all call on the Holy Spirit to do that thing in us that God has ordained for each of us, that we too will feel the fire, the power, the overwhelming impetus, to go out and do what God needs us to do so that Pentecost is always a day that is celebrated down the ages. In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
Amen.