**Pentecost: 31st May 2020**

**Acts 2.1-21, 1 Corinthians 12.3b-13**

Pentecost is the birth of the church. Last week we reflected on the ascension of Jesus – Jesus leaving his disciples to it, to get on with his work on this earth but how he would still mysteriously be with them through His Spirit. They had to wait for the Spirit to come on them and to receive the power to be witnesses to Jesus to the ends of the earth. The church was born at Pentecost.

When you look at the apostles that Jesus chose you can ask the question why did he choose them? Why didn’t he choose select rabbis, scholars of the law, gifted orators?

Instead fishermen, tax collectors, zealots, ordinary people. No executive search process. No Lord Sugar weeding out the weak apprentices. These are the last people you would choose to start a religious movement.

Of course, Jesus did this on purpose. He knew it would be almost impossible for them to depend on their human ability; instead, they would have to reach out to his promise of power from on high. He recognized that all too often the more educated people become, and the brighter they are, and the better their connections to human influence, money and power … the more they tend to look away from the power of God. They trust in God’s grace less and less.

Even worse is that in that upper room, waiting for this power, were people of recent spiritual failure. Those who in the moment of crisis had deserted their leader a few weeks ago. Would you want to build any kind of future on this group? I wouldn’t.

Yet they waited, in prayer, together in that upper room – for power. **The issue is not our ability but rather our availability to the person of the Holy Spirit**. Men and women who are truly used by God are necessarily humbled because they know the true source of their strength.

It’s always a dangerous thing to set about giving hard and fast rules and prescriptions for letting the Holy Spirit empower your life. The imagery of the Spirit in the story of Pentecost is that of wind and fire. Jesus used these analogies elsewhere to describe how the Holy Spirit may act. *The winds blows where it will* he said in John 3– you can’t control it - just be open to catch it when it blows – get your sails up and wait for the wind. Where is the wind of the Spirit at work? Get involved – feel the breeze! Bit like cycling - it’s hard work cycling into the wind – opposed to the wind. Much better to cycle with it!

We know from scripture and the testimonies of many down the ages that the work of the Holy Spirit is a comforter, a guide, a passion for truth and justice, the one who brings us peace, healing, unifies us, brings us together, empowers us to witness and continue the work of Jesus.

You’ve heard from the testimonies of Gemma and Gordon some ways the Spirit is at work. As I’ve been walking around the area meeting up with most people in our churches I’ve heard stories of your compassion and care for others through your work as nurses, care workers, teachers, farmers, supermarket workers, food distributors, street volunteers and co-ordinators, local government officials, sewers making health workers scrubs and face masks, listeners, financial advisors, social workers, community development workers. You are all the church of God, empowered by the Spirit. God bless you and equip you for the work you do.

One of the untold stories of this lock down is how two of our elders here at the Tab collaborated on creating ventilators for the NHS.

One of our elders works for the Ministry of Defence. He prefers his name to be kept out of the public domain. I will refer to him as ‘Bob’. Folk at the Tab know who he is!

In mid-March the MOD stood up all its engineering and scientific community with the task of seeking out opportunities to assist the NHS with the procurement of ventilators. This was to help meet the perceived need for intensive care facilities to deal with the first wave of COVID 19 cases expected in the UK. The MOD gave them freedom to get involved wherever and with whoever they saw fit to achieve the objective.

On the train home it occurred to Bob that veterinary ventilators already exist, and these could be easily adapted, manufactured, and qualified for the COVID 19 response. Bob sent a text to David, another of our church leaders who is a vet, sounding out these initial thoughts and in turn David put him in touch with Keith Simpson who makes ventilators for animals. [[1]](#endnote-1)

By lunchtime, the same day, they had agreed a plan of what was needed to put the merlin ventilator into COVID 19 action.

Keith needed opinions and views from the medical profession. Bob had a family relative who was an A&E consultant in a hospital and she was able to show the Merlin design (including David’s photographs) to her colleagues and those on the doctors version of Facebook. The feedback was along the lines of the hardware looked logical and most would be comfortable operating the Merlin ventilator. It also gave the medical profession a boost to know that others were working these problems as the medics had a feeling that as a profession they were looking into a precipice and there was very little help coming.

Bob also used his university contacts to sound out a colleague who is the clinical lead at a hospital and an anaesthetist.

The final opinion was from a colleague of Bob’s whose wife is a lead trainer in ventilation as training would be important.

Once Keith was content that the Merlin ventilator design would be fit for purpose Bob then advised on the NHS procurement and rate of getting ventilators manufactured and delivered.

Currently Keith and his firm Vetronics has provided ventilators into the NHS trust in Birmingham for the Nightingale Hospital at the NEC. The trusts around Devon and Dorset also received Merlin ventilators for frontline use. There are~ 100 units ready to go from Vetronics should more be needed in response to a second wave of infections for example.

It’s a remarkable story of inspiration, connections and power to get things done. The Spirit moves in amazing ways.

In my pastoral work I’ve heard of people finding a new found closeness to God through this pandemic. Finding a greater intimacy in prayer. Receiving dreams and visions from God. Finding a new strength to share their faith and encourage others to reach out for a relationship with God.

I’ve been humbled by the scale of generosity and support towards my sponsored walk for Christian Aid and the compassion of people towards those less fortunate than us in developing countries.

People who have been helped locally have been moved by the love of others and it has opened hearts and minds to the work of God.

Stuff is happening – The Spirit is at work.

We can’t control the Spirit but we can wait and ask and be open and available for the Spirit’s prompting and movement. On Pentecost frail men and women were not just given help around the edges but were filled with God the Holy Spirit. Who can deny that this is the great need in our churches today?

The New Testament church was often chaotic and wild. Paul’s list of the Holy Spirit’s gifts in 1 Corinthians 12 is in a letter where the Christians in Corinth were coping with divisions and splits because the rich didn’t respect the poor, there was all sorts of pastoral problems and leadership struggles and some thought they were more spiritual and superior than others. Paul is trying to hold them all together and say you all drink from the one Spirit – you all have different gifts, thank God for them and build one another up with them.

Many churches decide that they don’t want disturbing nor to run the risk of becoming chaotic and wild and so ignore the gifts that God offers through the Holy Spirit. They would rather have a calm, quiet life.

It is incredibly quiet in a grave.

The Holy Spirit produces a climate that is anything but dull and ordinary. Fire is a compelling image of the Spirit’s work. Warming, exciting, glowing, energetic yet also burning and dangerous.

Two persons were talking together before a large church which was being destroyed by fire. The first man spoke in a voice which could be heard above the voice of the firemen: "This is the first time I ever saw you at church." To this the second responded: "This is the first time I ever saw the church on fire."

I am not issuing a call for fanaticism. I am not issuing a call to leave your brain at home so that you can’t be a thinking curious person. We don’t need musicians working up the congregation into frenzy. We don't need manipulated manifestations or counterfeit gifts.

But we do need the real Holy Spirit upon us in power, in all our churches, of all denominations and traditions. The Spirit works in all sorts of ways - quiet ways as well as dramatic ways. Spectacular ways as well as gentle almost hidden ways. Different gifts, different ways.

Be open to the Spirit’s work in your life and let us, as a church, keep praying and humbly asking God to pour out his Spirit on us a church and as a community and as nation - that there will be a great turning to love and compassion for one another and for God.

1. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-52026687>

   <https://www.vettimes.co.uk/news/keith-helps-breathe-new-life-into-covid-fight/>

   <https://veterinaryrecord.bmj.com/content/vetrec/186/15/469.full.pdf>   [↑](#endnote-ref-1)