

Lyn Valley Mission Community

Pentecost

Ezekiel 37:1-14 Psalm 104:26-end Acts 2:1-21 John 15: 26-27;16:4b-15

In speaking and listening, writing and reading, may God be known, who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen

One of the activities often offered for Sunday School sessions on Pentecost is getting every child to make a crown decorated with flame shapes. The idea is that the imagery of the tongues of flame that we have heard in our reading from Acts comes alive for the children when they put on their crowns and see themselves as a group of apostles inspired and commissioned in the power of the Holy Spirit to show by word and action the eternal life of love that we are offered in Jesus Christ our Lord.

In our Christian worship together there are various ways in which we try to make visible for each other the presence of the Holy Spirit with powerful imagery: the living water of baptism, the use of candles which pick up the image of fire, in the Eucharistic prayer I draw my hands down over the bread and wine in prayer for the transformative presence of the Holy Spirit in communion. Our Biblical images include the likening of the Spirit to a dove – hovering over the waters of creation, and descending on Jesus at baptism; or to the strong wind that shook the house in today's account. The charismatic movement celebrates the presence of the Spirit in particular gifts like praying in the beyond-comprehension mystery of tongues, offering words of wisdom, bringing healing. In prayer traditions the presence of the Holy Spirit is identified as something that brings calm, joy, strength: consolation. We have all sorts of ways of trying to give form to the mystery of the Holy Spirit within and around us.

These ways exist in our worship to point us to the deeper reality of the life of the Spirit in us – which is alive, transformative, inspirational.

When we think of the story of Pentecost, it is worth asking where do we see the Holy Spirit in action most fully – and I would suggest it is in the preaching of the apostles and Peter, and in the reactions of those who believed – the Holy Spirit is the dynamic action in the story which makes all the difference.

To use words or images to convey that experience is always going to be a challenge. Just as a wiring diagram does not convey the power of the electricity, it just shows a route, so our images will fall short of the experience of life in the Holy Spirit.

An apostle is not someone who puts a flame crown on, it is someone who has been so impassioned by the Holy Spirit it is as if they are on fire with love.

Rowan Williams puts it this way:

“Spirit is the pressure upon us towards Christ’s relation with the Father, towards the self secure enough in its rootedness and acceptance in the “father” in the source and ground of all, to be “child” to live vulnerably as a sign of grace and forgiveness, to decide for the cross of powerlessness” which is to “bridge the gap between suffering and hope” .

In other words, the Holy Spirit is our growing in the likeness of Jesus.

Rowan continues:

“The sign of the Spirit is the existence of Christlikeness (being God’s child) in the world.”

And this is something that we do together, this is why Pentecost is also known as the birthday of the church – the Church is the gathering of those who are growing in the likeness of Jesus, as a sign of the Spirit in the world.

Again, quoting Rowan:

“The Church signifies (means, points to) the humanity that could be, could exist in the tension between security and powerlessness, so that it is indeed the place where the Spirit is seen.”

So, what do we see as we look around, or think about the community of faith of which we are a part:

We see worshipping that holds together the reality of our weaknesses, and the hope in which we share: "broken flesh and shed blood become the sign and promise of human wholeness"

We see each other, a group of different people, each with our different strengths and weakness, reconciled to God and each other through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus and the shared Spirit at work in each of us likening us to him.

We see the action of the Holy Spirit in real time.

To paraphrase a theologian: the face of the Holy Spirit is seen in the infinite diversity of redeemed human faces as they gather.

As we realise this – that we are the face of the Holy Spirit, here grappling with loving one another, affording maintenance of buildings and wanting to find ways to share God's love with those beyond church walls, but not always knowing how?

Can we begin to grasp what Rowan is saying? Can we see that we here we experience a place of security in God's love, even as we know our own weaknesses and fears.

If we are to be the signs of the Spirit in the world, we need so to value that trust and acceptance of our weakness that we allow the Holy Spirit to carry us out to be witnesses in the world – witnesses of our trust in God and our willingness to meet the suffering of the world without despair.

We are not called to be finished perfect objects, we are called to be those in whom the Spirit is showing what it means to be secure in God and weak, vulnerable, and compassionate to those who suffer, and through whom others are attracted to discover that they can live with the same trust, weakness and compassion.

To do this we need to surrender to the power of the Spirit at work in us. At the end of the service we will use a commissioning. Which I invite you to pray with in the coming days, and use as an inspiration for your own words and actions in the year to come.

I'm not offering you a paper crown of flames, but I am offering you the sight of yourself as a missionary apostle inspired and commissioned in the power of the Holy Spirit to show by word and action the eternal life of love that we are offered in Jesus Christ our Lord.

I pray that:

Amen