Acts 2:1-21

1 When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. 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. 3 Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. 4 All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability. 5 Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. 6 And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each. 7 Amazed and astonished, they asked, "Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? 8 And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language? 9 Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, 10 Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, 11 Cretans and Arabs—in our own languages we hear them speaking about God's deeds of power." 12 All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, "What does this mean?" 13 But others sneered and said, "They are filled with new wine." 14 But Peter, standing with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed them, "Men of Judea and all who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and listen to what I say. 15 Indeed, these are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only nine o'clock in the morning. 16 No, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel: 17 "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 your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams. 18 Even upon my slaves, both men and women, in those days I will pour out my Spirit; and they shall prophesy. 19 And I will show portents in the heaven above and signs on the earth below, blood, and fire, and smoky mist. 20 The sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood, before the coming of the Lord's great and glorious day. 21 Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.

XX

The events of Jesus life punctate our calendar and are observed in some way by many people, no matter what their relationship with God and the church.

Christmas is the event that celebrates the birth of Jesus and the beginning of His ministry on earth, a day that is widely celebrated and enjoyed. Easter celebrates the resurrection of Jesus and God’s ultimate victory over sin and death, again a day that I guess would be considered in the confectionary trade to be a massive day of celebration.

If I were to announce that our church was not going to observe Christmas and/or Easter anymore, you rightfully could say we would be turning our backs on events that are central to our understanding of what it means to be Christians and what it means to belong to the church.

Wouldn’t it seem that something essential was missing from our lives as Christians if we did not have an Easter service and a Christmas Eve Mass?

Can you imagine going an entire year without hearing about there being no room in the inn when Jesus was born and even in Lockdown although we could not meet we were able to say through our Facebook Service “He is risen, indeed!” as the pronouncement of His resurrection?

Imagine a year with no Christmas tree and gifts and no Easter eggs and cards. Imagine a year with no songs such as “Silent Night” or “Christ the Lord Is Risen Today.”

However, there is a third holiday, a third celebration, a third sacred event that is just as central to our understanding of what it means to be a Christian and what it means to belong to the church; though most non- Christians do not celebrate this event, it is equally important to the Christian community as Easter and Christmas

That third event is Pentecost Sunday. The day when we celebrate the day when the Holy Spirit descended on the apostles who were gathered in a room in Jerusalem. Before Pentecost, those men were hiding from the public for fear that what had happened to Jesus might also happen to them.

After Pentecost, those frightened men had become suddenly and miraculously equipped and empowered to carry on the ministry Jesus had begun—in the very city of Jerusalem where Jesus recently had been put to death.

Firstly, let’s get a few things straight, Firstly, Pentecost is important for all  members of the Christian family and not just those who call themselves Pentecostals, God’s Holy Spirit is alive and well in all traditions of the Church and should be equally celebrated by the whole Church.

The Day of Pentecost is no more a possession of Pentecostals than observing baptism is the possession only of those who call themselves Baptists. Pentecost, as baptism, is a gift God gave to the whole church, the whole body of Christ.

Secondly, God’s Holy Spirit is a gift to the Church, and He exists and acts in each of our lives very differently. The workings of the Holy Spirit are not badges to show how holy we are or how good we are, they are gifts from God, given in season to help the Church and not signs of how deep, shallow, right, sound our faith and lives are. God’s Holy Spirit was sent as a comforter and advocate not a club to beat each other up with.

Pentecost is one of the major holidays on the Jewish calendar that occurs 50 days after Passover. The word Pentecost literally means “50th or 50th day.” In Jesus time Pentecost was the time when the Jewish people celebrated the first harvest of the year. It was a time when they gave thanks to God for what the land had produced and for farmers.

For Christians, Pentecost marks the birthday of the Church, the day when Peter preached the first sermon about Jesus as we have just heard in our reading for Acts 2 1-21.

The first thing we must marvel at is the change in Peter, this is the same man who 53 days earlier had said about Jesus; “I never knew Him.” This is the same man who on the night before the crucifixion when asked  if he was one of the disciples, denied knowing Jesus, Peter who ran away in to the night weeping because he had lost his nerve and denied Jesus.

Now we see Peter transformed, instead of saying he did not know Jesus and hiding we find him  declared in no uncertain terms the Man they had ordered to be crucified was, in fact, the Son of God.

How did Peter go from being frightened to being fearless? How did Peter go from being cowardly to being courageous? How did Peter go from denying Jesus to defending Jesus before the very same people in the very same place?

Peter did not simply change his mind; Peter was totally transformed. Something happened to Peter and to the other 10 apostles, which resulted in total transformation.

Pentecost marks the outpouring of the Holy Spirit by which human beings are equipped to do the work of God.

The celebration of Pentecost marks the day when that message about Jesus began to make its way to people and places all over the world.

Pentecost is an important day in the life of the Church, but one that does not seem to get the same press or razzmatazz as Christmas and Easter. For instance, there are no Pentecost trees, no Pentecost school plays; and I have never heard of the Pentecost Bunny or been given a Pentecost egg.

But this is an oversight and one that needs to be addressed we need to make room for Pentecost in our understanding of what it means to be a Christian, we believe in a triune God and until we make time and the gift of the Holy Spirit is essential to our understanding of God.

Jesus tells the apostles to remain in the city of Jerusalem until the power of the Holy Spirit came upon them. He was not sending them out to build his Church and establish His kingdom based on their life experiences or their understanding of religious laws and teachings.

Jesus told them to wait for the power, wait for the anointing, wait for the Holy Spirit to come upon them. Once they had that blessing, that indwelling that relationship, they would be ready to go. Until that happened—wait!

Pentecost Sunday is the day we remember when and how the Holy Spirit transformed the Disciples for a purpose.

While they all were huddled in a room in Jerusalem behind locked doors and shuttered windows, they heard the sound of a rushing wind. What appeared to be tongues of fire seemed to settle over the head of each person. They began to speak in other languages, but what they were saying was understood clearly in the native language of each person gathered in Jerusalem that day.

You see, the power of Pentecost was not the unknown tongues in which the apostles were speaking to identify them as Holy, set apart or a badge of honour. The miracle was that people from every known region of the world were able to understand what was being said in his or her language. God gifted the disciples not to glorify them, but so that they could give to others.

It was immediately after the miracle of understanding that something else of equal importance took place: The work of being Christ stopped being to sole responsibility of Christ and was passed to the Disciples, and then throughout time to the Church in every place and generation, and now rests with US.

Let’s think about this, Easter and Christmas are events that involve Jesus as the primary actor. On Christmas, Jesus was born into the world and laid in a manger. There were no disciples present for that event.

At Easter, Jesus was raised from the dead with all power in His hands. Once again, there were no disciples involved in bringing that event to pass.

There is nothing for us to do on Easter except celebrate and give thanks for the work Christ has done on our behalf.

At  Pentecost, though, all of that changes—We are called away from our roles as spectators into the role of central characters in God’s work.

As a result of Pentecost, we do not watch what somebody else is doing for God, but are being equipped by the power of the Holy Spirit so we can become actively involved in the work of creating his kingdom where we love one another as he loves us and love him with all that we are.

That is what Pentecost is all about; it is the day Jesus officially transfers to His disciples the responsibility of spreading the message of living in an eternal relationship with God.

Pentecost is the day when God begins the process of introducing the world to faith in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Most important of all, Pentecost is the day when God decided the way that the message of Jesus would be spread not by the singular ministry of His Son, Jesus Christ, but by the life, actions and faith of people who love God.

The time for following Jesus as a disciple or learner is over, and the time to carry His message forth as apostles has come. Those disciples were no longer spectators; the time had come for them to do the work themselves.

When I left school I became an apprentice  bus mechanic, it was all I wanted to do as a boy and like many of my friends all the time after school was spent in sheds fixing old motor bikes or hanging around in garages. As an apprentice I spend 4 years mostly watching Phil Murphy the fitter I was apprenticed to, and one day after my trades test, I was on my own, turning all my observations into actions. I was now fully fledged on my own and working in a fail dangerous industry.

This is a bit like Pentecost, the disciples have now been released from the apprenticeship and are now the masters of proclaiming the Gospel.

Today we are the disciples of our age, blessed by the Holy Spirit and empowered to do……..

Well that’s what we need to be asking, what is God calling us too, what is he calling us from, what do we need to make this possible?