

Sermon Pentecost 2020 Acts 2: 1-21
by Revd Kathryn Waite

'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.'

Waiting, waiting ... we have all been doing a lot of waiting over the last ten weeks or so haven't we? Waiting for the latest news about infection rates, waiting to hear when and how the lockdown restrictions will be lifted, waiting to see loved ones again, waiting to see whether university students will go back in the autumn, waiting to hear when the church can be open again and we can hold services there once more. Lots of waiting...

This year the picture of the disciples waiting in the upper room, seems quite frankly all too familiar. At our Bible study earlier this this we looked at a number of pictures of the Ascension and saw just how confused the disciples were depicted as being. They had been with Jesus through the three years of his ministry, they had seen him put to death, met him after the resurrection, and watched incredulously as he ascended and now they have been told to go and wait in Jerusalem for the Holy Spirit. It must have been a very difficult and confusing time for them as they waited.

But as they sat and waited in the upper room, life in Jerusalem continued as Jews gathered from around the known world, Greeks, Arabs, Romans, Africans, and Asians.....

Crowds of people (remember what crowds are - not just more than 6 people gathered together, but real crowds) and they were gathering to celebrate Pentecost, the Jewish feast of weeks. This was an agricultural festival and marked the time when Moses was given the law by God on Mt Sinai, God present then in clouds of fire. It was celebrated 50 days after Passover – hence the name Pentecost - meaning fifty in Greek.

But as Jesus' followers waited, something strange and amazing happened - the Holy Spirit came down filling the whole house with a rushing wind. And tongues of fire rested on each of the disciples – mirroring Moses' meeting with God on Mt Sinai that Pentecost was marking.

And then, and then it was the turn of the crowd to be bewildered, confused and astonished as the followers began to speak in many different languages. Each one in the crowd hearing the message in their own tongue. That day the Holy Spirit broke down the divisions that existed between people in the crowd – even though they spoke and understood different languages, they were all able to hear the good news of Jesus Christ.

And then they heard Peter – yes, the same Peter who denied Jesus, but who was now standing up and speaking, explaining that the disciples weren't drunk, which

was the crowd's automatic reaction but reminding them of the scriptures; quoting the prophet Joel who foretold a time 'when your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions and your old men shall dream dreams.' Just because young women and old women are not mentioned I don't think means that they were being excluded – quite the contrary the pouring out of the spirit at Pentecost was an event for all people – male and female, rich and poor, people of every nationality.

That day the Holy Spirit overcame divisions – working in so many different ways:

Strengthening the disciples as they waited; enabling each of them to be able to speak in a different language; drawing the attention of the crowd to what was happening, perhaps by the rushing of the wind; giving words to Peter to speak and opening the hearts of those that were listening so that 3,000 people were baptised that day. Divisions were broken down and lives were transformed.

And us - well of course we can't yet go out in crowds, we can't travel distances and attend festivals and probably won't be able to do any of those things for some time yet. But as we wait we can pray that we will be filled afresh today with the power of the HS.

And having received the Holy Spirit, I wonder... can we dare to dream dreams and have visions of our new world post lockdown, a world in which divisions have been healed. So much has changed over the last few months – communities have come together, and neighbour has helped neighbour. Can we dream and pray for those divisions to keep being broken down?

Imagine what our world would look like if we allowed the Holy Spirit into our communities? Perhaps then we would truly have a world that is fair and just for all people, in our city, our nation, and across the globe.