

## Sermon Pentecost 2017

When I was introducing the concept of Pentecost to our Sunday Club I asked them how they thought that the disciples might have been feeling and it was clear to them that they would have been scared. Now I don't know about you but being scared can be debilitating; you can be struck dumb or riveted to the spot; you can be so scared that you cannot think. The thought of taking exams used to fill me with dread. I remember taking one paper and it took me an hour to remember what my name was. And that was just an exam! How did we all feel when we were taking our driving test? It took me two goes as the first time I could not remember the meanings of the highway signs yet I knew them off pat beforehand. How often does fear stop us from moving on?

So how were those disciples really feeling? Let's look back on this situation – only 50 days ago they were all subjected to seeing their teacher; their guide; their friend being brutally crucified; they must have felt totally alone. They were being hunted down as they were members of the same group of

radical upstarts of Jesus. He was now gone according to them and they, the Romans, were out to get the rest of them so that they would not cause any trouble. Little did they know!

Today marks the birthday of the church so 'happy birthday' church. They so nearly didn't make it. The Roman soldiers only had to get a sniff of where the small (but ever growing) band of Jesus' followers were and they would have arrested each one of them. They hid away. Wouldn't you? They were scared, scared to go the same way as their leader. Did you know that when they met as a group in anyone's house they would mark the sign of the fish outside the door to let people know where they would gather to worship? They would have been scared just hearing someone approaching their room – tension would have been all around.

From our Gospel reading today we heard of one of the times that Jesus appeared to the disciples after he rose from the dead. We hear that Jesus appeared to them; breathed on them and said 'Receive the Holy Spirit.' And that can be scary too. But Jesus chose his band of followers well; he knew that although

they would be scared they would not turn tail and fly; they were more the stoical type; they would stick around even though the adrenalin would be pumping.

Then they had the trauma of saying goodbye for a second time when they saw Jesus being taken up to heaven. They may well have received little comfort knowing that Jesus said: 'I am with you always.' They were really alone this time. Throughout our lives we sometimes think that we are totally alone and that God is far off but that is when he provides us with comfort and support (even though we don't know it at the time.)

And then of course we have what happened just 10 days later – we remember the event today – Pentecost. Just 50 days after that dreadful event we now see and hear that they are being supported; supported by the Holy Spirit. They are not alone and would never be alone again; knowing that the holy spirit was with them. It is the time when they began the community of Christians and that is why today also marks the birth date of our Church; our community. We none of us are alone; we need never be scared; we have God walking with us. We are told that

the holy spirit came upon them and landed on their heads in the form of tongues of flames. How scared would they have been then! But now they have that inner knowledge.

These disciples had a job to do and that was to spread the Word; teach others what Jesus had taught them; pray with others and live out a lifestyle that Jesus would have wanted. So how best to equip them so that they would not be scared and feel alone? – help them to communicate; give them a voice. It is generally agreed by historians that Jesus and his disciples primarily spoke **Aramaic** (Jewish Palestinian **Aramaic**), the common language of Judea in the first century AD, and most likely a Galilean dialect distinguishable from that of Jerusalem. These disciples had spent all their lives in a comparatively small area in and around Jerusalem and Jerusalem is part of Israel where the language spoken is Arabic and of course Hebrew. Even if they spoke Hebrew they would have reached a target audience of say a million people. In 1998 it was estimated that 5 million people speak Hebrew. And Arabic? Well they could have learnt it later on in their travels. Today it is said 420 million

people worldwide speak Arabic. But this gift of speaking other languages meant that they were equipped to spread those teachings of Jesus throughout the world. What they had to say would be heard by everyone. The gift of communication is one that is treasured.

Being an English-speaking person it means that I can already speak the same language as 400 million people in the world but I feel proud that I have the ability to communicate with over 220 million more people around the world as I can converse with them in French. I could go to any one of 5 countries in Europe and share communicate with them because I can speak French. 26 countries in Africa speak French. 3 countries in Australia and the Pacific. All told 33 countries in the world speak French. And that means that I can speak and converse with over 600 million people if given the opportunity. But my ability fades into insignificance when I see Stephen spending time in Germany. He has always been able to speak French very well though German is his favoured foreign language. So that

means that he could communicate with between 90 and 95 million more people around the world who speak German.

By virtue of the ability to speak to others in their language meant that the disciples would be able to spread the teachings of Jesus to many more areas. No longer would the Word be enclosed in just one area but would begin its spread throughout the world.

Yes, they were scared – wouldn't you be with the thought of going out to speak and spread the good news of Christ risen but they were no longer alone. They were the community of Christians enflamed with a passion to reach out to others; to teach words of love and understanding. They had been given the power of the holy spirit.

But it's okay to be scared. Performers say that it helps to get the juices working so that you can give a lively performance. It is perfectly natural to be scared when something happens that you are not expecting but just remember that if we hand over our fear to God then that will allow us to be calmer and that will allow us to give ourselves over to the work that God wants us to do and we must remember as Jesus said to us 'I am with you always' and he is - if we allow him into our lives.