**Pentecost:**

 **Acts 2 v 1-21**

**Jn 15 v 26-27; 16 v 5-15**

I wonder what your reaction is, to this passage in Acts? I guess Luke, the writer in Acts, wants us to be amazed, for our jaw to drop. The description is, after all, astounding-a violent wind, tongues of fire, and people speaking in tongues. Its not something you see every day, is it?

If I’m honest, though, my reaction to this passage is, that it’s yes, amazing, that it’s yes incredible-but why don’t we see things like that now? Why doesn’t it happen now? Why don’t things like that happen to me? How come God doesn’t send wind and fire to change the world? Is this just a story to describe things in the past, and how Christianity grew-not really worth bothering ourselves about, because, after all, things like this don’t happen now!

Well, oddly, weird things do happen to people, which they can not account for, except to say it was an experience of Gods spirit. Joy Dipple was telling me last week how she asked to receive God’s spirit and the next day felt absolutely overwhelmed with love and peace which she felt for others when she went out. Roger felt God’s presence intensely whilst sharing the peace one Sunday-Joy said she could tell something had happened when he didn’t complain about her forgetting to record ‘Last of the Summer Wine.’!

My husband had an unusual experience following news about a close friend who had become very ill. Ed wasn’t a Christian at the time, but knowing that our friend was close to death did what many are compelled to do-he prayed. He said he felt a peace and assurance that he couldn’t explain. “He’ll be alright,” he said to me. I couldn’t understand it, I knew how ill our friend was. “I don’t think he will,” I said to Ed but again he said, “he’ll be alright.” Now, please don’t think that I’m saying Eds prayers were answered-that God stopped our friend dying because we asked Him to. It wasn’t like this, Ed said it was more a revelation of what was already going to happen. And our friend made a full recovery.

As for myself, I didn’t believe in all that sort of stuff, thank you very much! So one day I went to a prayer day and the leader asked us to close our eyes and for God to send His spirit. We were standing up at the time and I remember starting to sway a bit. I thought, “well, that’s because I’m standing up with my eyes closed, it always happens, its nothing.” Then my breathing changed-it became deeper, almost like sleeping, and I felt a warm peace. I realised I was rocking a lot, and thought, “I must look like a right fool.’” Then someone said to me, “Let go,” and I thought, “no, I don’t believe in this!” Then I fell.

All incredible tales. Like the tale in Acts, beyond normality. But if you are thinking, well that’s all very well, but its never happened to me, please let me assure you that this had nothing to do with being holy, good or special. You are not a lesser Christian if you have never experienced God’s spirit in this way. I personally think that God sends His spirit in spectacular ways for specific reasons. I think that what happened to me that day in the church, was purely so that I would believe in these experiences. It didn’t change my life in any obvious way-I went home after, ate tea and carried on with what I was doing. But I now had a belief that I didn’t have before-which is a good job, really, as I would have been a bit of a rubbish priest if I had trouble believing in Pentecostal spirit! But I think, maybe, that’s why I needed to receive His spirit in that way, because I need to believe so others will.

The passage in Acts describes a time when the disciples had seen Jesus ascend to heaven. Having been guided and nurtured by him for three years, they would have felt alone. They knew they were not popular with the religious leaders, they knew persecution awaited them. They needed a powerful experience, I think, to reinforce their belief and give them an inner strength. See how Peter was instantly moved to talk of scripture and speak of its fulfilment in Jesus. God’s spirit gave him a strength and confidence.

Furthermore, the disciples were able to talk in tongues. Some people interpret this as a sort of spirit language that sounds rather like goobbledegook that people speak when overwhelmed by Gods spirit. However, in this passage it actually names the many and varied languages that the disciples were able to speak. Well done to ……../our reader for being able to pronounce them all! But what’s important is that this enabled the disciples to spread the message to all peoples. So the message of Christianity was strengthened and empowered and gained momentum.

You know sometimes we hear people say, “I’m not religious but I’m spiritual.” (Phil talking of this week ago).What they are saying, I think, is they are sensitive to something other, something abstract, something that can’t be defined, something beyond themselves, and they are quite attracted by that. But they are “not religious” because that would involve, they think, rules, limits, rigidity, do nots! How sad that actually the freeing spirit of God, which, I think, is actually what they are attracted by, is something they see as a straight jacket. And perhaps, in our rituals and codes of behaviour, and how things are done the church have unwittingly reinforced this.

So how could we show others the freedom of His Spirit, the joy it gives us, the strength and love in adversity that we receive from His Spirit.

Perhaps we need to be to be open to His Spirit, and to be receptive to His many forms. God’s spirit is of God, and of Jesus-so He can not be limited. Gods spirit is described in the Bible as wind, fire and rain. But if you think about it wind can be breeze or whirlwind, fire a spark or inferno,

rain dew or downpour. Think of the difference between a whirlwind, and its power to change things-and a breeze, and it ability to cool and sooth. Fire-a spark that can warm or feed and keep us in safety, or an inferno, which can clear. Rain-a gentle life giving dew, or a cleansing downpour, life giving for dry places. Remember that God speaks in a gentle whisper as well as a violent wind. Different, at different times, for different people.

And if Gods spirit becomes part of you, and you begin to see the world through spirit filled eyes, then you realise how Gods freeing spirit is all around us. It’s the laughter following sadness, it’s the dew on a grass blade, the sunlight shining through a leaf, it’s the bravery you didn’t know you had, the joy you feel looking at a loved one, the comfort you feel following sadness. Receiving Gods Spirit doesn’t make bad things go away. Some people mistakenly think that being a Christian means that every thing will then be perfect, and are then disappointed to find that things still go wrong, life is still hard. But the disciples continued to be persecuted as they tried to proclaim Gods message. But what His spirit did do was give them an inner strength, words and confidence to enable them to carry on in the face of opposition.

Put simply, God’s spirit is Gods presence, and people will experience His presence in all sorts of ways. But I believe that we have all received Gods spirit. Whether we recognise His spirit in a physical way, or whether we feel His presence within us, or whether we are aware of Him or not, I think He abundantly blesses us with His spirit.

 And He sent His spirit to help us. So be open to Him, give Him space to enter your heart and help you with whatever you need help with. But then remember to show His spirit to others with acts of kindness and sharing him with others. You’ll see His spirit, not when you look inwards, but when you look outwards at the effect you have on others.

CC-I thought we’d listen to a piece of music now, to still the time and give you a space to be quiet with your God-to talk to Him or be silent with Him, and to receive him. So let’s be blessed, let’s be refreshed, let’s be anointed. Amen.

Music.

GS-David is going to lead our prayers today and he will give you a space to be quiet with your God-to talk to Him or be silent with Him, and to receive Him. So lets be blessed, lets be refreshed, lets be anointed. Amen.