

When I am looking forward to something really exciting, I get all sorts of things going through my mind. This week 8 years ago, we as a family moved from Coleraine to Jordanstown to begin my second curacy. In January 2017 we moved from Jordanstown to Ballyclare. But in the lead up to those moves there were many thoughts racing through Alison & my head. Will the children settle? What will the parishioners be like? What about the area and the house? We all have situations like this, where we think ahead but we don't actually know what the outcome is going to be until it happens.

On Sunday past we thought about the coming of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost. Jesus had promised the disciples that the one called the Holy Spirit would come, and they must have had all those feelings too...what would happen when He came? What will he be like? We may never know precisely what happened on that Day of Pentecost, but we do know that it was one of the supremely great days of the Christian Church, for on that day the Holy Spirit came to the Christian Church in a very special way – as tongues of fire.

Have you ever wondered why the Holy Spirit came on each person in what seemed to be tongues of fire? Well tongues would and still symbolise speech. I wonder have you ever thought how complete confusion would occur if we didn't have tongues to articulate our words.

On that day of Pentecost, a festival which was held each year reminding people of the period in Israel's life after the Passover, where Moses was given the Torah or the Law, so jews from every tribe would descend on Jerusalem. It was a hive of activity and noise. And every tribe would have been speaking from their different tongues, languages or dialects. Therefore it's no surprise that the disciples were given a supernatural gift to be able to speak in other languages, so that the message of the good news would be spread throughout a captive audience during that Pentecost celebration. What amazing timing in God's mind to send his Spirit when Jerusalem was packed with people from all nations, and a mission field was right before the disciples to reach out into. This was after all what Jesus had commissioned them to do, and now by his Holy Spirit he had given them the tools to do it.

There's a huge lesson to learn from this for our society today. We need to learn a new language to reach people for the gospel; we need to be able to talk to people in a way they understand. It's not the Gospel message changes, it can't. But how we present it may need to be rethought. It's no longer good enough to expect people to walk in through the doors of our churches. It's no longer good enough to expect people to understand the language of the church that we have been used to as part of our upbringing in the Church of Ireland. We've got to be equipped by God's Holy Spirit for a new mission.

So then why was fire used? Well fire was vitally important symbol for the Jews. Their spiritual heritage had used fire for purifying, to offering burnt offerings so that the undesirable aspects of their lives were offered up through the purifying flames. Fire symbolised God's purifying presence, which burns away the undesirable elements of our lives and sets our hearts aflame to ignite the lives of others. So today we need the fire from heaven to cleanse us, to give us purpose, and to help us spread God's word.

Let's think about that fire for a few minutes :

Firstly today, We Need a Refining Fire

There is a much-needed emphasis today for the necessity of holy living! We are called to be a holy people. We are called to walk in righteousness, in other words a right living with God. You know, if we profess Jesus as our Saviour, people always notice when we are not living right. That is why we need to be coming to God and letting him refine our lives. It is the Holy Spirit that purifies the mess of our lives, makes us pure and makes room for all the beauty that God wants to put in us...patience, love kindness, gentleness and all the other gifts of God...the things that others can see in us. But more importantly, we are called to be holy, because God is holy, and we are to be like Him. God urges us to be Holy in I Peter, in order that we will honour him with our lives.

Secondly today, We Need an Illuminating Fire

so that the light of Jesus is seen shining from our lives. If we are in Christ then our lives should radiate what the Spirit has given us. It reminds me of coal. We have a stove in the rectory, and when it lights up it lights up the room. Similarly, when we have the spirit of God in our lives, it should light up any room we enter, we should be attractive to others, not physically, but our character should be attractive because we know God and he lives his life through us. With our compassion ministries, if all we do is meet a community need, then all we are is another community group. But in those connections with people, we desire to share the love and light of Christ in our conversations.

So we need a refining fire, we need an illuminating fire, and finally today, we **Need a Spreading Fire**

Remember the fragility of the disciples after Jesus had left them. They felt so alone. They locked themselves away in fear that the authorities would come and punish them like Jesus. But the early church encountered a sound like the blowing of a violent wind and flames of fire which would win the world for Christ. And if that's what they needed then today we need the same manifestation of the power of Pentecost today. Many people see the church as irrelevant to their lives today. Not because it has no relevance, but because so often the church has lost the fire that attracts people to us, and therefore spreads. Folks we have got to call daily on God's spirit to equip us to ensure his good news full of love and acceptance and grace spreads. We can't allow the fire of the spirit to be contained to just our church buildings. It needs to spread as we walk out of here and chat with family and friends. Our hope should be that the spirit spreads into their lives and awakens them to their need of Jesus.

On the day of Pentecost, there were about 100 believers, but, once the Holy Spirit came and the people started to exercise the gifts and power of the Holy Spirit in them, people were amazed and came to know Jesus! It says in [Acts 2:41](#) that 3000 were added to their number that day!! In [Acts 2:47](#), it says that God continued to add to their number every day! Imagine what it would be like if we had one new person come into an authentic relationship with the Lord each Sunday let alone each day!! God is able to do more than we could EVER imagine! Lets ask that God will pour out his Spirit like he did in the days gone by so that we will be a strong and mighty Army, not a pile of dry bones. We will not see any life in God's church if we do not call out on the fire of his Spirit to breathe life back into us and equip us.

Amen.