

I don't know about you, but when I am looking forward to something really exciting, I get all sorts of things going through my mind. In the lead up to coming to a new parish, there were many thoughts racing through Alison & my heads. Will the children settle? What will the parishioners be like? Have we made the right decision? 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.

And it was the same for the early church, 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? 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 and without our tongues we cannot communicate effectively. And for me communicating the Gospel, not just by word, but also by living it in our actions is the most effective way of sharing the love that Jesus has for every person. However in any sharing and building of relationship, it will always be through our words and conversations that ultimately we have the opportunity to tell others about the good news.

And 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. In a sense, we too 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 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.

And so the disciples were filled with tongues, and tongues of fire. So why fire? Well fire was a 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. Now you may think, well what has that got to do with me today? Well actually the Holy Spirit is our only mediator and guide to our Father God, and so we need the fire from heaven to cleanse us, to give us purpose, and to help us spread God's word. And so let's look at these.

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. 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 1 Peter, in order that we will honour him with our lives.

Secondly today, We Need an **Illuminating Fire**

So that the divine light is seen shining from our lives. The fire imparts to every Christian both the fruit of Christ-like character and the gifts for Spirit-empowered ministry. We hope that people will see the light of Christ shining from us. And maybe again you wonder what that means for us today. Well it means nothing different to the gifts which God bestowed on those that believed 2,000 years back. For what are the fruits of the Spirit that should be illuminating from us - love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. And the gifts of the Spirit are this - 1 Cor 12 – the spirit gives words of knowledge to people, the spirit gives faith, he gives gifts of healing, the power to do miracles, the ability to prophesy, discern between different spirits, the ability to speak in different languages that they had not known before, to other the ability to translate.

If we are in Christ then our lives should radiate what the Spirit has given us.

And then finally, today, We Need a **Spreading Fire**

Wind and fire make for an unstoppable combination. 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. If we wonder why church numbers are down, if we wonder what we need to do, then there is nothing other than calling for God's Spirit to equip us that will truly make a difference.

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 each Sunday let alone each day!! Lets ask that God will pour out the fire of his Spirit like he did in the days gone by