



Pentecost Sunday

5th June 2022

Greetings my brothers and sisters in Christ, what a joy it is to be here, as we come together to worship and give thanks and celebrate the day of Pentecost, and the life giving gift of the Holy Spirit.

I would thank Reverend Mel, for allowing Jill and I to lead this celebration of Prayer, Praise and Proclamation.

Our thoughts and prayers are with Rev Mel, Elizabeth and Jenny as they attend and experience their Cursillo weekend.

I pray, that today's message, will lift all our spirits, as we journey together, and encourage us, as we live out our lives as Christians, committed to lives of service, in God's Kingdom!

Let us pray.

Heavenly Father, as we gather together as living stones, part of your Church, we ask the Holy Spirit to fill our hearts, kindling in them the fire of your love. Almighty God, speak to us through your Holy Spirit, and as we walk in the light of your Spirit may we grow in wisdom, always rejoicing in the comfort He brings, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

I just love it when our readings really challenges our comfort zones, and encourage us to recalibrate our understandings and actions. I love the challenges especially with some of the names, for example from our 2nd reading in Acts, and of course the story of the Tower of Babel from the Book of Genesis.

Have you ever wondered about our two contrasting readings today? The wonderful comparison of the coming of Pentecost, in contrast with the Tower of Babel story that follows on in the story of the fall, with Adam's and Eve's desire to have knowledge that properly belongs to God.

Here in Genesis 11, the people begin to build their tower so that they can get as near to heaven as possible, and grab a bit of fame and glory for themselves,

"Let us make a name for ourselves", they decide.

But with this impulse for power also goes a nameless and ill-expressed fear.

The people persuade themselves that without their tower, they will be '*scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth*'.

As far as we, the readers, can see, there is absolutely no justification for this fear.

- Who is threatening them?
- What force will cause them to disappear?

Their instinct is to build higher and higher and huddle together.

Of course, as a result of their actions, the very thing that they had feared actually happens. They are indeed forced apart and scattered over the whole earth, because they can no longer understand each other or work together.

The Lord, we are told 'confused their language'. Perhaps that way they might start to make a little more sense. Their earlier statements and actions might have had a kind of mad logic to them, but they were without any basis in truth. After Babel, they can at least no longer pretend that their intended system makes sense.

And now we come to the Acts story of the day of Pentecost and it's richly satisfying reversal of Babel! The scattered people of God come together; they had been used to being separated by language, but now God's own words unite them. Wow!

The messengers of God are people who know they are dependent upon God.

The Holy Spirit comes upon Peter and the other apostles in such a powerful and supernatural way, and they cannot even begin to pretend that this is their own doing.

If the builders of the Tower of Babel are guilty of trying to be like God, the disciples are only too aware that they are nothing without God's power.

Peter's Pentecost speech sets out the great paradox of God's power. Here are the apostles – simple men, not trained language experts – making themselves heard and understood to the great gathered crowd of many different languages.

I recall back in 1993 our Cursillo Men's team gathered together over many Saturdays, to train and form Christ's men's team for the forthcoming Cursillo. Each Saturday we lovingly critiqued the talks to be given by us Laity @ the Cursillo. One such talk we critiqued, the content was very difficult to understand, due to the heavy European accent of the gentleman giving the talk.

My recollection is that no one person commented openly.

Come the Cursillo weekend, his talk was given, to a room of 30 odd men, whilst we the team sat utterly amazed, he spoke so clearly, everyone understood his message! We the team stood, clapped, with shouts of joy, for us this was a Pentecost experience.

Well back to St Peter. Peter reminds his hearers of the great Old Testament promises of the coming of God's spirit in power, and claims that this is what they are now witnessing.

And in the verses that follow today's reading, the paradox becomes even more pointed, as Peter goes on to connect the power of God with the crucified Jesus.

So today's reading from Acts picks up a theme that is dear to St Paul's heart, as well as the Gospels. Over and over again, God chooses His messengers those who seem inadequate and wholly unsuited for their great task.

That's why the story of the Tower of Babel is so illuminating in this context, because it suggests that nothing divides people more quickly from God than a desire for power, and an arrogant determination to rely on themselves. Those who have no illusions about their own gifts might actually be the only ones who are prepared to turn to God and ask for help.

Perhaps that's why Jesus tells his disciples in (John 14.7) of St John's Gospel, that the world cannot receive the Spirit of truth.

Perhaps the world is too obsessed with its own truth, its own crazily self-authenticating systems, to receive the Spirit whose job is to unite us with the father and the Son, and to return us to our true dependence upon God. Jesus does promise his followers a kind of power. Starting from Pentecost, Acts shows us the kind of great works that the disciples are able to do in the name of Jesus. The point of this power from the Spirit is to point to the Son and, through the Son, to the Father.

The builders of Babel wanted power for the sake of self-glorification and self-protection, and it cost them together unity and their ability to relate to each other.

The power of God has nothing to do with self-protection and everything to do with restoring unity and communication, which is why the outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost is so characteristic.

It enables Peter and the Apostles to communicate, it enables them to make connections, to see the common threads running throughout the history of God's dealings with his people; and it makes them missionaries, longing to share a common life in God, the common life of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Just as Jesus sent the disciples, we who have received the Holy Spirit are also sent, to continue that mission.

Every week, the Deacon sends us out, saying, "Go in peace to love and serve the Lord." And we reply, *"In the name of Christ, Amen."*

In other words, we are going out representing Christ, *in Christ's name*, to love and serve him.

Not in our name, not through our own efforts, but through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Amen.