

PENTECOST – THE CHURCH’S BIRTHDAY (June 9, 2019)

ACTS 2: 1-21

We remember special birthdays –perhaps because of the age we have reached or because who was able to attend a particular celebration. Different cultures have different ages of significance. Here in Australia it used to be 21. That was when you were deemed to be an Adult. You could vote, sign contracts and do other things you couldn’t do before but now 21 has become 18 in many respects.

When we first think of the Church’s birthday we often think of the anniversary of when a building was opened or when a new Denominations was inaugurated. The Uniting Church began on June 22 1977. But what about the Christian Church? We can say the Church’s true birthday began at Pentecost.

Such a strange occurrence. Jesus had asked the disciples to stay in Jerusalem at the time he went back into Heaven. What were they thinking would happen?

Before Pentecost the disciples didn’t fully recognize who Jesus was, even though he ministered and lived with them for years. John the Baptist had said that the Messiah would “baptise you with the Holy Spirit”.

At Pentecost, however, the same disciples became fearless leaders. Jesus’ closest followers, the ones he chose to be with him, began to heal the sick, cast out demons – even face the authorities and go to jail – and some would die because of their professions of faith.

What occurred to transform these men? A rushing wind and what appeared to be “tongues of fire resting on each one of them”.

Wind: in Hebrew, “ruach” – meaning wind or breath. The breath that gave life to Adam in the Garden of Eden. The wind that rattled the dry bones and brought life again to Israel in Ezekiel’s vision. The wind that stirred up the waters and brought faith to frightened disciples in a boat on the Sea of Galilee. The wind would give life, strength and faith to the disciples.

Fire: Burning a bush that gave Moses his Mission to save the people from slavery. Now ennobles these disciples with faith and reminds them of their mission to “go into all the world and make disciples”.

As each one received this life-giving power they went outside and began to preach the Gospel in the languages of the people in the market-place. They all

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heard and understood in their own languages. Yet still there were sceptics. Peter had first to defend them. They would hardly be drunk at 9.00am!

Peter preaches, basing his sermon on Chapter 2 of the Prophet Joel. This prophecy was now being fulfilled. At one time, when men were building a tower in order to reach God by their own doing, God confused their language making the project impossible. Now they all hear the good news of salvation – of how to have a relationship with God – clearly, in their own language – no confusion, no misunderstandings. The rest of the Book of Acts tells how these men and others who were converted through them went throughout the known world proclaiming this message of salvation. All over the world, down through the centuries, until here in Sydney, Australia in 2019 and in the Korean and English languages we worship that same God because we have received that exact same Spirit.

It was an unsettling time both for the preachers and the hearers. They all could see and hear but I am sure not many really understood exactly what was happening. Commenting on Numbers Ch. 21 The Christian Reformed Church of America said, “The Spirit thrusts God’s people into worldwide mission. He impels young and old, men and women, to go next door and far away into science and art, media and marketplace with the good news of God’s grace. The Spirit goes before them and with them, convincing the world of sin and pleading the cause of Christ.”

This is the unsettling Spirit, the One who thrusts, impels and goes before us. While that Spirit may not force us out into the world, we certainly get the impression that the Spirit pushes and prods us sometimes quite irresistibly to do or say or go somewhere for God.

It is certainly appropriate to pray for the gentle Holy Spirit. It’s legitimate to pray for the Spirit’s renewal, comfort and abiding presence. It’s appropriate to ask God to send the Spirit to restore predictability and remove us from risk.

Whether it’s the “still, small voice” that came to Elijah or the rushing wind and fire that came to the disciples in that upper room, God still speaks, motivates, moves, inspires, sends His people to do His will and be His people, the Church.

Happy Birthday Church. We have received the most precious gift in receiving The Spirit of God into our lives. We can show our appreciation by living as faithful, authentic disciples of Christ. All because of this day – Pentecost.

AMEN