

Day of Pentecost – 4 June 2017

Acts 2; Numbers 11; Psalm 104; 1 Corinthians 12; John 20:19ff

‘Would that all the Lord’s people were prophets!’

Here we are on this fiftieth Day of Easter – Pentecost – the completion of our Christian Passover from death to life. We hear again the story from St Luke (Volume 2) of the first Day of Pentecost, with its highly layered imagery and symbolism of wind and fire.

In the Jewish calendar it is the Festival of Weeks or Shavuot, the fiftieth day after Passover when the Jewish people celebrate the giving of the Torah on Mt Sinai. An event which they celebrate as the basis of their identity as a community, the codes and symbols which bind them together as God’s people.

For us, Pentecost is the story of the coming into being of a new community of God’s people, a community of which we – 2,000 years later and on the other side of the world – are members; the community that came into being through the life, teachings, actions, death and resurrection of Jesus, and which receives the breath of life through the outpouring of God’s Spirit.

These two communities – the Community of the Torah and the Community of the Spirit – are both founded by the same breath of God and both called to live in love. Luke in Acts stretches this experience out to the symbolic 7 times 7, perfection times perfection, plus one. For St John, and the early church mothers and fathers, Good Friday-Easter Day-Pentecost are all seen and experienced as a unified event. Today’s reading from Numbers provides us with an Old Testament Pentecost well before Luke’s description in Acts.

The importance is not in the timing, rather it is in the experience of God’s people.

As wind and flame remind us of the ever-present air around us, they also remind us of the ever-present breath of the divine spark within us all. As the wind fans a spark into flame, so the Spirit of God stirs the divine gift within our hearts into loving action.

These are the gifts which St Paul describes to the Corinthians, all of which are given for the building up of the body of Christ, the Church. These are the prophetic words which are poured out on even Eldad and Medad. All we know about these two is that they had not gone to the tent of meeting with everyone else. We don't know why, perhaps they didn't believe in all that religious stuff that went on in and around the tent. Nevertheless, the spirit rests upon them. Joshua would have prevented them as false prophets, but Moses discerns the divine presence, even where and among those Joshua least expected. Moses proclaims: 'Would that all the Lord's people were prophets!'

Today we celebrate the experience of the fullness of the Paschal mystery, the movement from death to life.

Today we celebrate the experience of the gifts of God within our humanity.

Today we celebrate the experience of the gift of community.

Today we celebrate the experience of our inter-connectedness as human beings who all breathe the same air of life.

This Spirit inspires, the Spirit disturbs, the Spirit calms.

The Spirit calls us to prophesy to the truth: to challenge injustice, prejudice, and violence. To call out fake news and challenge it with the truth of the good news of faith, hope, and love.

The New Testament Scholar, Professor Bill Loader, of Murdoch University in Perth, reflects prayerfully:

O God, You are Spirit;
You are wind;
You are breath.

You meet us in the wonders of creation,
in the awe of wonderful things,
in the terror of fearful things.

You blow among the fallen leaves,
the broken branches,
the whining pain
and the whirlwinds of delight.

Your wind gently touches our brow
with comfort and caress;
your forgiveness raises us to life;
your challenge disturbs our tidy piles
and spreads opportunities before our eyes.

Wind, wind,
you come from nothingness and go to nothingness,
and when you are still,
there is nothing we see, nothing we hear,
and you surround us in our not seeing and not knowing.

Gentle Spirit, breathe on us your life.
Strong Spirit, open our closed doors to your compassion;
Universal Spirit, inspire us to sing and sigh for justice;
Spirit of Jesus, teach us to walk,
to work, to pray, to live, to love,
your way.

This is powerfully reflected for us today in the choral mass setting by Jean Langlais, who expresses the motifs of struggle, mystery, and triumph in his masterpiece the *Messe Solennelle*. Composed in Paris after the horrors and struggles of the Second World War, the music – in words and organ – leads us through the commotion of the Day of Pentecost towards one major destination – the final and magnificent cry at the conclusion of the Agnus Dei: Dona Nobis Pacem! Grant us Peace!

More from Bill Loader:

Wind of nothingness and awe,
wind of knowing and unknowing,
wind of bearing and begetting,
wind of secrets and mystery,
O wise, wise wind,
whisper to us your grace.

Awaken our dreams,
expand our visions,
heal us for hope,
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

Dona nobis pacem.

We are all Eldads and Medads now.

Paul Bower
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