**Pentecost Sermon**

***John 14:15-26 & Acts 2:1-21***

In the readings today we are given two New Testaments accounts of the experience of the Holy Spirit, in the book of Acts we are given the wonderful description of how something like a great wind arose in the house and there appeared to those there tongues of fire which were distributing and resting on each of them, and it is at this moment the they become filled with the Holy Spirit Wow!

I love the wording that follows this little scenario “the crowd was gathered and were bewildered” I was thinking well you would be, wouldn’t you!

After this another strange thing happens everyone who was there began speaking in many languages so everyone could be understood.

I like this story because it gets you going doesn’t it? Even the way the story is told makes you feel all excited and overwhelmed, it creates a feeling a bit like when someone tells you some really good news and you’re really pleased. Whenever I read this passage, I always feel a little jealous and think I wish I was there!

Let’s face it as Christians we would all like to have that kind of spiritual experience, wouldn’t we?

However, in contrast to this description the reading from St. John introduces us to another experience of the spirit. John talks of a spirit that the world does not see or know, he introduces us to the word advocate for the spirit, and when we think of that word we think of someone who intercedes or mediates for us, but in John’s gospel it is so much more, this advocate’s purpose is primarily one of love and enlightenment, which ties in well with John’s other descriptions of the spirit as a teacher and a comforter. Whatever way it is described he is clear that it dwells within you.

So how are we to draw these apparently different ideas together? Firstly, a spirit descends in a blaze of nothing short of a firework display and secondly, we are informed that actually it is a gentle, enlightening power that is already in us. Which one is it you might wonder? For me I think it is both.

Let’s reassess the actual words of Acts, we are told a sound came from heaven *like* a mighty wind and there appeared to them what looked like tongues as of fire, yet in John’s gospel he declares that we cannot see or know the spirit because it is not of this world. So, what happens if we cannot make sense of these transcendental or heavenly things, we are of course left second guess what we think it might be.

As another example in this gospel when Jesus is baptized and the spirit descends on him, the gospel writer records that it *looked* like a dove.

Now at this stage I could go all academic and tell you about how some scholars think that the whole Pentecost story is just made up of Old Testament allusions for the benefit of explaining the purpose of the early Church blah blah but I won’t, simply because I believe that the only difference between the account of the Holy Spirit in the book of Acts and the one in John’s gospel is one of interpretation.

When we as Christians are asked what we think the Holy Spirit is, it’s extremely hard to pinpoint. It’s one of those things that just is, we cannot explain its existence, we just know that it is present in our lives, sometimes at more prominent times than others.

But what is clear from both accounts though is that even if we don’t know it, it certainly knows us. And perhaps using John’s ideals of the spirit and applying them to the account in Acts we can make the story much more inclusive, remember when I said at the beginning how deep down we might all wish to have been part of that story, well perhaps if we read deeper into the scripture provided we have to ask ourselves was it really the disciples speaking a language that the multitude understood or was it that the ears of the multitude were opened so that they could understand? If this is true, then we can start to make a little claim to it in a way that we might just understand.

You’ve all heard of using your gut instinct, having good discernment, holding the ability to work out what is right, having the wisdom to understand or simply being able to see more clearly with the ‘eye of faith’. Have you ever wondered how do we do that? Why do we do that?

Well I believe that it is the work of the holy Spirit, we are all made very different, which means that we all have our own unique personal experiences with God.

So, one important message we can learn from these diverse stories is that it helps us to acknowledge that it’s okay to have spiritual experiences that are different, and that’s important because some people can get really fearful about divine relationships, worrying that they might not be doing it the ‘right way’! Just because it is different it doesn’t change the source it comes from.

And so, it’s this wonderful diversity and collective acceptance of each other that makes up this fine institution that we call church.

I am sure that God did not want a church that wasn’t challenging and real, from its biblical roots he wanted the gathering of those who could get excited and experience life changing moments, I believe God wanted his churches to be the epitome of the incarnation in a way that the people it served could always understand.

He calls each and every one of us to be an element of his church on earth, whether we worship in buildings or not, we stand alongside our brothers and sisters from times gone by and bring to the holy table all that we are…and that’s the important bit. God opens our up our senses through the Holy Spirit so we can hear and share in his inexplicable life changing love and that is why each year we celebrate and remember the beginnings of the church and the gift of the of the Holy Spirit to all who are wanting.

To conclude, I wanted to share with you that in my younger years I used to have a wonderful T. Shirt that I wore so much it wasted away. It was just before I began my journey towards training to become an ordained priest. It was a plain T. Shirt with these simple but powerful words. On the front it said, ‘Today I am not at church’ and on the back, it said ‘Today I am the church’. Amen