

Good morning

Today we celebrate and remember the birth of the Church.

Here are my personal thoughts on Pentecost.

I dislike the use of the word 'church' as it is now associated with church buildings, church denominations, church organisations, or church institutions. I do not think that Jesus had these in mind when he said he was going to ask His Father to send them a Counsellor, the Spirit of Truth.

The 'them' Jesus was going to send the advocate, the helper, the guide, the Holy Spirit to, were the people who were gathered in His Name, to praise his name and to ponder what it means to be a follower of Jesus.

The 'them' in Greek is the Ecclesia, that is the gathered followers of Jesus. I will from now on use the term Ecclesia in preference to church.

So nearly 2,000 years ago the Jesus' small ecclesia consisting of the Apostles and Disciples (male and female) were gathered in a house in Jerusalem. While the text does not specifically say so, I am fairly certain that the ecclesia were gathered in prayer.

For the writer of Acts, St Luke, all major events start by the withdrawal of Jesus and His disciples to somewhere private for prayer. So it seems logical that as the ecclesia waited in Jerusalem, to be clothed in the promised Power from upon high, that they should be gathered in prayer.

The spirit descends on them 'like' a wind and touched each of them with what looked 'like' tongues of fire. Note that the two descriptions are prefixed with 'like'. Compare this with the description of the Spirit descending on Jesus 'like' a dove. Many

human encounters with God in the bible describe the encounter with God with the prefix 'like'. Encounters with God are beyond descriptive words and can only be described in terms of the closest everyday things that best fit the experience.

My experience of the Holy Spirit coming upon such on an ecclesia was that I heard the spirit coming 'like' a gust of wind shaking a marquee, except we were in a building, and when the spirit touched me it was 'like' a firework going off in my brain. The effect was 'like' the rewiring of parts of my brain to become more aware of God in and around me. In reality the experience was beyond description expect for what it was 'like'.

The Ecclesia, on the first Pentecost, having been touched by the Holy Spirit were changed men and women. This bunch of ordinarily folk, like you and me, then added 3,000 to their group in one day!

Ponder on those words. This bunch of ordinary folk added 3,000 to their number in one day.

This small ecclesia must have drawn many thousands more to their vicinity. People were drawn by the public commotion, curious to see what was happening, intrigued to hear an explanation, cautious, dubious and some came to mock.

We are so used to the story of Pentecost that we miss how seriously weird this stuff is. For the crowd to have seen and heard the antics of the disciples, it means that the ecclesia had left the safety of their house. For the crowd to have heard them speaking in their own languages, the ecclesia must have been shouting at the tops of their voices. Grown, sensible people, who were deeply religious, at a religious festival were shouting loudly in foreign tongues and acting as if drunk. Weird.

It is worth noting that the Holy Spirit comes on the whole ecclesia, not individuals, and it is the whole ecclesia that is sent out to proclaim the message of Good News. This is not about personal fulfilment and personal development.

The receipt of the Holy Spirit is about the ecclesia being sent out.

When I was touched by the Holy Spirit we were at an early New Wine. That week was so amazing that I did not want it to end, I wanted it to go on for ever. After the final evening celebration, I was bereft, watching the car headlights leaving the site heading off into the darkness. Then God showed me that they were like embers, from that weeks bonfire of light, being scattered to all parts of this country. Why? We, the ecclesia, were being sent out like bonfire embers to start new fires. That is exactly what happened. That years 3,000 have now become hundreds of thousands. Every year the bonfire of light at New Wine and other conferences is scattered anew and new fires are started.

The Holy Spirit descending on the ecclesia is always to start a new ecclesia. Not for personal enrichment or glorification.

I believe that the ecclesia are still empowered by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit to carry out Gods will.

I believe that that is what happened to me and the ecclesia in the early 1990's.

I believe that this stuff still looks weird.

In 1996 a group of eleven of us were at New Wine when the Toronto Blessing arrived. It was a truly weird time and we, as a group, were much troubled by many aspects of the Toronto Blessing. Yet we were drawn to the commotion it caused – curious to see what was happening, intrigued to hear an

explanation, cautious, dubious and ready to mock if we were not convinced. Yet these three things I ponder in my heart:

- 1) The truly bizarre effects that the blessing had on people and my conversation with God that I would be his servant, but I was not going to do that – pointing at the guy in front of me bouncing around on his knees making very odd noises – If I saw it now I would say he was off his face on spice.
- 2) The radiant vicars wife telling of how she had arrived so tired, disillusioned and spiritually on empty. But after the touch of the blessing how the little words and big words danced off the page of her bible.
- 3) Our group of eleven ordinary folk. Three of us are now ordained; two were to lead their local fellowship; one has worked tirelessly with Christian groups; Jon shared his love of choral music with hundreds of youngsters who would never otherwise of set foot in a church and is presently developing software teaching computers to translate the bible into new languages; one taught RE and got us into her secular school to take services. The two oldest were Kath and Bernard Baker who encouraged us to go to New Wine in the first place and dreamed dreams for St James.

To this day I am unsure about the experience, but look at what this ordinary bunch of folk have done and are still doing in the name of Jesus. I continue to ponder.

I have been fortunate, that in the formative years of being a Christian, I encountered the move of the spirit around the ministry of John Wimber (a truly scary man of God).

That move of the spirit has fuelled revival of parts of Christ's ecclesia for thirty years and I believe it is now time for another move of the spirit.

Actually, I believe that the church always needs the spirit to move in the ecclesia. The ecclesia needs continual refreshing in the spirit - a continual renewal of Pentecost.

What better time to seek a new move of the spirit, a refreshing of Pentecost than right now.

So this ecclesia of Jesus, here at St James, we will do the same thing as that first ecclesia. We will pray simply and wait on God.

So sit comfortably, relax, still your mind, place your hands on your lap with your palms upwards.

*Silence*

Father, send your Holy Spirit on your ecclesia in the name of Jesus.

*Silence*

Amen