

# **CELEBRATING PENTECOST**

## **Day of Pentecost**

**15th May 2016**

**Acts 2:1-4, 12**

**John 20:19-23**



The hustle and bustle of a large crowd, it's noisy, verging on the chaotic. A violent wind rushes in. Flaming, divided tongues of fire dance among them. There is a loud, piercing babble as the disciples are filled with the Holy Spirit. People are amazed and astonished. Such is the intensity and the magnitude of the moment that many onlookers think these people are rolling drunk!

The Day of Pentecost really hits the mark. After the melancholy of Lent and the distress of Holy Week, indeed, after the tragedy of Good Friday and the alluring mystery of Easter Day, Pentecost comes with a bang. Pentecost lifts us up, sweeps us off our feet, pulls the rug from beneath us and carries us forward with a rush of enthusiasm and joy.

And this morning we come fittingly dressed in loud, bright colours. The banners hanging in the church reflect an enticing exuberance. Bright red is the colour of the day. Our hymns and songs are unashamedly upbeat. What a day!

Indeed, the Day of Pentecost is a day when we get to love Jesus out loud, when we are challenged to fly the banner of our faith and proclaim the Good News in a thunderous, ear piercing way that says God is alive, God wants us to get on with things, God is calling for our resounding applause. God is willing our rapid, uncompromising response!

This is all well and good. Pentecost prompts us to go out there and make disciples. Pentecost calls us to an assertive, confident, bold faith that speaks out and engages forthrightly with people who-ever they are.

Here the model of street evangelism and door-knocking with the purpose of sharing faith comes to mind. It's the kind of approach that invites new comers to stand-up in front of everyone in church to introduce themselves.

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It's the method that encourages one to go around the room in an impromptu way asking people to tell the group something about themselves they have never shared before. Or to, in a public meeting, point to an unassuming member and ask them without warning to lead the assembled body in a closing prayer.

For you see, this Day of Pentecost goes down well if you are an extrovert. This Day of Pentecost rings bells if you can think on your feet, stand out in the crowd and feel confident about making a noise. But what about those 50 per cent or so of us who are introverts?

While extroverts are more likely to revel in the events of Pentecost, with their preference to be "out there" thriving on the energy and joy of the moment, introverts struggle with such things. Introverts gather energy from "within". Contemplation, reflection and the joy of solitude feed their souls - and here I should say "our" souls because I am an introvert.

Indeed I enjoy my solitude, I am a listener rather than a talker, I ponder, think and reflect before taking action and I much prefer one-to-one serious conversations than engaging in "small talk" with large, dynamic groups.

Hence Pentecost frightens me a little. The fact that Peter raises his voice to address the crowd with such fervour and zeal amazes me. That the power of his word "cuts" people to their "heart" stuns, indeed it overwhelms me, as some three thousand people receive Christ on that day. Indeed, John the Baptist with his rugged capacity to confront people with the truth, Paul's eloquent skill as he engages in public debate the with fiercest of opponents and the amazing calibre of Aaron, the brother of Moses, to be a mouthpiece for the people often leaves me feeling quite inferior.

And I am left with the thought - to be an effective witness for Christ, does one have to be "out there"? Does one need to be a gregarious socializer, a confident mingler or a lively party animal?

The Pentecostal Church movement with its colourful, charismatic, outgoing, dynamic leaders has always intrigued me. For here we witness extroversion at its most confident. And I have no doubt such people are called, equipped and empowered by God for the task.



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But where do I fit in? If you are an introvert, where are you placed? In order to be a faithful, effective witness to Jesus Christ, do we need to take on an extroverted persona? Do we need to be “out there”, thriving on the energy of the group and being the life of the party?

Prevailing assumptions in our community and even in the church suggest so. But leaders across many fields actually do not fit this “extrovert” model. Take Bill Gates, Steven Spielberg and Barack Obama for example. Moreover, there are notable introverts among high achievers in the field of writing including J.K.Rowling, in theatre and the arts with Meryl Street, Angelina Jolie, Arthur Boyd and Bob Dylan, in the field of science with Charles Darwin and in the field of advocacy and peace building with Mahatma Gandhi.

Indeed, Mahatma Gandhi says *“In a gentle way you can shake the world”*. Here it’s important to note the business of changing the world or transforming communities is not the solitary domain of the extraverts. Introverts also have a role to play, albiet a different approach where contemplation, reflection and solitude play a vital role.



Here the booming voices of those prophets who proclaim out loud need to be complemented by the carefully considered actions of the shepherds who take time to nurture and care!

While it must remain in the sphere of mere speculation, scholars suggest key Biblical figures including Abraham, Moses, King Saul Elijah and Elisha were introverts. Some even suggest Jesus was border line “introvert”. However we will never really know.

But the point is this. You don’t need to be an extrovert to serve God. You don’t need to be the life of the party or be a hands-on “mover and shaker” to follow Jesus. You don’t need to be “out there” to meet the requirements of being a disciple.

Friends, today we acknowledge two readings from the New Testament. The first is from the Acts of the Apostles. Here Luke records the momentous coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost .

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“Pentecost” is a transliteration of the Greek word “pentekostos” meaning “fifty” and it is has its origins in a Jewish festival known as the “Shavuot” or Feast of Weeks,. This is a harvest festival that originally celebrated the giving of the law on Mount Sinai fifty days after Israel’s liberation from slavery in Egypt as recorded in the Book of Exodus.

And as we know, Pentecost was an amazing day of miracles. It was a day that pointed to the overt, dynamic revelation of God’s powerful presence among God’s people that stirred people in to action and brought at least 3,000 people to faith.

But Luke’s account does not have the final say here. In the tradition of what we refer to as the Johannine literature, the Apostle John gives us another account concerning the coming of the Holy Spirit.

Here there is a somewhat different tempo as John tells the story of a group of frightened disciples who are locked away in a private room. They are tired and exhausted. These fragile men are silent as they reflect on the events that have taken place.

And in the midst of this contemplation and this solitude Jesus appears to them. Jesus offers them his peace and then shows them his hands and his side. Jesus then breathes upon them the Holy Spirit and quietly commissions his followers to witness and service.

This is John’s “Pentecost”. And, importantly, it comes to us in a very different way to Luke’s overtly “extrovert” presentation in Acts.

For me, as an introvert, John’s account resonates much closer to my heart and soul. For here, there is a sense of quiet, contemplative freedom to encounter the reality of the risen Christ without all the fanfare and the flourish of an ostentatious, noisy affair that appeals to the energy and the drive of an extrovert.

Indeed, this is an intensely personal, peaceful encounter where Jesus reaches out to each of his disciples in a quiet yet profound way. It’s a deeply moving scenario where, in the solitude and quietness of the moment, Jesus’ disciples are empowered to go. Jesus’ disciples are commissioned serve the Lord.





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Friends, on this Day of Pentecost, let us consider what this day means for each one of us. As “extroverts” it may be a day when we say a big “yes” to the miraculous, dynamic actions of God as the Spirit is given to those who are open to God’s incredible, astonishing presence. As “introverts” it may be a day when we respond to God’s quiet, contemplative presence as Jesus comes to us with his hushed yet profound peace.

On this Day of Pentecost extroverts no doubt revel in the joy, the vibrancy and the splendour of this momentous occasion as presented in the Acts of the Apostles. That is a real joy. And our community, indeed our church may long for that extrovert ‘X’ factor. We may yearn for that outgoing dimension to ministry that knocks on doors, woos outsiders, unsettles the placid and brings people enthusiastically to Christ.

But introverts also have a vital role to play as, in a different way and with a different tempo, the will of God is prudently discerned, the Spirit is diligently listened to and the Lord’s directions are carefully discerned.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, this Day of Pentecost is a day for us all. Whether we be extroverts or introverts, there is a place for each and every one of us. As we celebrate the coming of the Spirit - the Spirit that gifts us with the presence of the risen Christ - let us be assured that we are all called, we are all equipped, we are all commissioned to love and serve the Lord.

For, whether it be the vibrancy and joy of the Acts account or the solitude and peace of John’s account, God’s Spirit comes to us today. And that’s what is important - that’s what matters - and that’s what we celebrate.

Thanks be to God – and a happy Pentecost!

Amen.



John Barr