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Christ Church West Wimbledon
Sermon : May 23rd, 2021
“Pentecost”

PENTECOST 2021

Many years ago, a Welsh girl came to London to work as a maid in one of the large villas that populated Wimbledon. On Sundays she travelled many miles across the city to worship with her own people in a Welsh church. The family in the house where she worked were kind and generous to her and invited her to come along with them to worship at their local church, to save her having to travel so far on her day off. But the girl very courteously refused, saying she would rather make the journey to share in worship in the language which she knew and loved so well. The master of the house gently pointed out to her that Jesus was not a Welshman. “I know that, sir”, the girl replied, “but it is in Welsh that he speaks to me”.

On this, the day of Pentecost, we have heard read the famous passage from Acts, where Peter explains to the crowd the behavior of those who had begun speaking in different languages. Peter insists that it was not drink which had affected them but goes on to remind them that this is what Joel had prophesied. The theme of the book of Joel is ‘The day of the Lord’ and the book includes the line "Your young men will see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams." Joel was anxious that neither should be left out. Both young and old will be blessed in this way. When the Spirit comes, he draws all together in ministry without distinction. Sons and daughters will prophesy and servants will prophesy. The Spirit will draw men and women together in ministry, he will draw young and old, lower class and upper class, together in ministry, all classed as God’s servants. The Spirit comes upon all, fills all, gives gifts to all, and empowers all for witness and ministry. There is no distinction in God’s eyes – for all human beings are of equal worth and standing.

So, this morning we give thanks that God gives to us all, young and old, male and female, many gifts and talents. It is true that human beings always have the complete freedom to ignore or to squander these gifts and talents – but equally many do actively use them to the glory of God for the building up of his church – and we give thanks that twenty-one centuries later there are still men and women who continue to try to serve the church in the best way that they are able.

So today, let us give thanks for the gifts God has given us and let us pray that he may continue to pour his gifts on more people so that there will always be men and women of vision who will be ready to serve the church in the years to come.

I have particularly been thinking about this as I have spent a bit of time re-reading the annual reports on the life of this Church put together in the years past. Going back over the years there is often a common theme – thanking those who contribute their gifts and encouraging others to offer theirs! But the theme has often been of encouraging the church to move forward in faith and hope and love.

Since Easter the disciples of Jesus had been learning to let go of the familiar presence of their teacher and friend. Now on the Day of Pentecost they sense him with them more deeply and closer than ever before. Suddenly the most important thing to do is to communicate God's love to those who don't know it. As one writer has put it: "the ability to speak in the different languages of the visitors to Jerusalem is all part of this newly given love for people. The Holy Spirit, coming like flame, sets the disciple's hearts on fire with love for God and for other people. No wonder Peter sees in all this the fulfilling of Joel's prophecy; suddenly it all falls logically into place. He realizes that they are experiencing the first wave of a new age, with God's spirit flooding out into those of all nations; God living and speaking to all peoples." No wonder the maid knew God spoke to her in her native Welsh.

So, in 2021 we must take heart and look forward with confidence to all that lies ahead. The life of our world has taken a huge hit over these past 15 or so months with the onset of the coronavirus – and of course many countries are still seriously affected. Our confidence has taken a real hammering. But many people are nothing if not resilient. As the Christian community in this place, we need to be full of faith and hope for all that lies ahead – and do our best to help others around us to have that same sense of faith and hope, as did those disciples at that first Pentecost.

And it does seem to me that every person has their role to contribute to the life of our world – to be people of faith, to be people of hope, to be people of love. Above all perhaps to be people of sheer and natural goodness. Pentecost began the movement of the Christian Church which included all without exception, acknowledged their contribution and valued it – and we, as the disciples of this morning's celebration of Pentecost, should do exactly the same today – to be people of faith, to be people of hope, to be people of love – and at the very least to be people of sheer and natural goodness. Desmond Tutu puts it like this: *'Do your little bit of good where you are; it is those little bits of good put all together that overwhelm the world'*. Individually we may not be able to change the world – but together who knows what difference we can make. So, it follows that the words of today's collect seem to be particularly appropriate as we pray with real fervor: *"that God through the Holy Spirit may ignite in us the holy fire, strengthen your children with the gift of faith, revive your Church with the breath of love and renew the face of the earth"*. And perhaps we can all say a loud Amen to that. Amen.