

240519 All Saints, Pentecost

The first Pentecost is an interesting mix of orderly and anything but orderly. After the Ascension, the disciples were waiting in the city, in Jerusalem, as instructed by Jesus before his ascension. That was orderly. All nations were gathered, as in any great city. The promised Spirit of God fell on them like a wind, like fire. That was anything but orderly. It was raw energy. People who spoke different languages understood each other. The most striking gift of the Holy Spirit is of communication. It's hard to think of a more important gift in a world increasingly fractured by national self-interest at a time when we need to be holding together in this vulnerable common room that is planet earth.

And in the Gospel we heard that the Spirit leads the disciples into truth; in the collect we prayed for the Spirit giving us good judgement, it leads us into wisdom.

The gift of the Spirit sent the Church out from Jerusalem over all the earth.

Very quickly the Church had to deal with issues of organisation and order. Were Christians part of the synagogue or separate from it? Did Gentile men have to be circumcised, like Jews, to become Christian? What was the place of women within this community and what about slaves? What was striking to people outside the early Church was the way in which Christians cared for the dead. They treated them with reverence and graves became places where they worshipped, thin places where heaven and earth almost touched, inside the city not outside the walls. It said something about the reverence for life with which people were to be regarded. Girl babies were no longer put on the hills to die. All people were to be treated with respect.

Christianity was an energised, inspiring missionary movement that changed not just individuals. It changed the world.

We have the same elements today – a faith which inspires and moves and a building and an organisation to be sustained. Today we will receive Paul St John Misso into the C of E and, at the end of the service, after coffee, it's our APCM. This is orderly Church. *And* All Saints and the C of E stand for something distinctive and inspiring.

At a time of religious decline it's easy to forget the importance of religion. When I was training for ordination in the 1970's there sociologists projecting that religion would die out by 2050. Even in the secular West, we are much clearer that's not going to happen and the religious is a part of life. 80% of the world identify with a particular faith. It's pluralism we have to deal with more than secularism.

And it's also easy to forget the immense contribution Christianity has made to our society. Tom Holland in Dominion says that the Church is in danger of forgetting what it has given society – education – schools, universities, libraries, health care – many of our hospitals are Christian foundations, local government – which started in the parish system, many charities and the care of the poor, the commissioning of art... And today, the last Sunday of this year's Premier League, lots of football clubs which started their lives as church clubs.

All Saints, this building and its people, stands for something within Brighton and Hove. At it's best it is an account of what it is to be human and what it means to be good as people with whom God is close through Jesus Christ. We don't always live up to it but we are willing to be judged and held to account by it. Paul Misso said to me after the service in Chichester last Monday to celebrate the 30th anniversary of the ordination of women priests that he wanted to be part of a Church in which it is possible to argue. In that sense the C of E can be very like the synagogue. "Where there are three Jews there are four opinions." A friend who is a rabbi said, "only four!"

Before Catriona can inducted to be the vicar of this church she has to make the Declaration of Assent and swear oaths of allegiance to the crown and to the diocesan bishop in all things lawful and honest. The Preface to the Declaration of Assent is marvellous:

The Church of England is part of the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church, worshipping the one true God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. It professes the faith uniquely revealed in the Holy Scriptures and set forth in the catholic creeds, which faith the Church is called upon to proclaim afresh in each generation. Led by the Holy Spirit, it has borne witness to Christian truth in its historic formularies, the Thirty-nine Articles of Religion, *The Book of Common Prayer* and the Ordering of Bishops, Priests and Deacons. In the declaration [the person to be

licensed is] about to make, will you affirm your loyalty to this inheritance of faith as your inspiration and guidance under God in bringing the grace and truth of Christ to this generation and making Him known to those in your care.

It is orderly *and* inspiring, broad but not boundaryless. Today on this Feast of Pentecost *and* the day of our APCM,

we affirm our loyalty to this inheritance of faith as our inspiration and guidance under God in bringing the grace and truth of Christ to this generation and making Him known to those in our care.