

Reflection for Pentecost Sunday 31st May 2020. Acts 2: 1-21 & John 20: 19-23

There is something almost primeval about the description of the movement of the Holy Spirit in our familiar passage from Acts. There are perhaps echoes of the wind that swept the face of the earth as a formless void before God, through fire forged from the core of this earth, combined with the other elements of wind and rain formed our wonderful world as described at the beginning of Genesis. I was reminded last week of the sheer force of nature as I wrestled in the strong winds with our vast "Solanum Crispum" (Chilean Potato Vine) come adrift from its trellis and determined to flatten all around it (including me at one point...I have the scratches to prove it). As I read of floods in Northern India and of wild fires in dry grassland this week I reflect on how little control, at times, we have over God's creation.

The Holy Spirit can have a reputation for being something personal, warm and friendly maybe suggested from the description of Jesus breathing his spirit upon his disciples in John 20: 22. For me, I often think of the Holy Spirit as there to give us a gentle nudge into action when we/I need it. However, when we consider the description of the spirit moving among the disciples in Acts there is something wild, bewildering, violent and untamed about it. Here the Holy Spirit is very much a force for movement, for action. The disciples, in particular Peter, are not just "strangely warmed" or gently nudged. This is not so much about feeling the spirit descend upon them, as being swept up and carried out into strange places such as the lands described in the passage. We know that the disciples were rather anxious worried and confused by the times leading up to this moment. We are not told how they felt after the coming of the Holy Spirit except that they appear to have gone with the flow which has a force of nature about it as they are poured out into the world echoing the words of the prophet Joel.

Perhaps, as Jesus's disciples today, that is how we should be more willing to be. It may seem a bit abandoned, a bit frightening (particularly in today's times) to let God sweep us off our feet in the rush of the flow of his boundless and undeserved love that we cannot control. A love with such strength and power that, if only we would let it, would lift us up, bearing us aloft, as we are carried out on a that tide of love, to spread the good news that the living Christ crucified is risen, ascended and will come again in glory.

When I look again at the Pentecost message from Acts, I see it anew as one of letting God's love come down upon us and free us, not just as individuals but as a nation, and as a world. Like those early disciples, all that time ago, perhaps it is more a question of "taking our feet off the bottom" and daring to go with the flow. Daring to let the Holy Spirit in fire, wind and water carry us along such that we cannot help but share God's love for us, reflected in our thoughts, words and actions for each other, out in the community around us. I wonder whether that is something much needed, particularly in these present times.

I hesitate to end with the words of a fairly recent worship song but, whether you like such things or not, I think they are quite apt as I leave you with our reflection today:

*"Set a fire down in my soul,
that I can't contain,
that I can't control.
I want more of you God – more of you God. "*

Yours in Christ, Frank.