**John 15.26-27; 16.4b-15, Acts 2.1-21.**

**Pentecost: 24th May 2015**

**8:00 & 10:00 a.m. at St. Andrew’s Totteridge**

*May the words of my mouth and the meditation of our hearts always be acceptable to you, O Lord, our rock and our redeemer (Ps.19:14).*

At the end of Luke’s gospel, during his resurrection appearance to the disciples, Jesus said he’d send them power from on high to help them spread the good news around the world. In John’s gospel this power is called the Advocate, the Spirit of Truth (15:26), and Pentecost is the time this promise is fulfilled.

Pentecost, or Whitsunday: The feast of the descent of the Holy Spirit upon the Apostles on the 50th day after Easter – the second greatest festival in the church. In the West, the vigil of Pentecost soon became a secondary date for baptisms – the word Whitsunday is said to derive from the white robes worn by the newly baptized on that day.

Early in the Gospel of John, Jesus speaks to Nicodemus who struggles to understand why he needs to be born again of the Spirit. He offers these enigmatic words: ‘The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.’ (Jn 3.8)

A theologian of my acquaintance (RT) equates this Spirit of truth with the human spirit of restlessness, as somehow inspired by it. He says restlessness is not necessarily a bad thing, something that needs to be alleviated; taken notice of yes, but not evaded. It can be what energizes us, what gets us out of bed in the morning; it may be why you’re here today.

‘When the Advocate comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who comes from the Father, he will testify on my behalf.’ (John 15.26)

Who is this person, this ‘Advocate’ (Gk.: *parakletos*), also occasionally translated as ‘Helper’; it could be one called to help in a law court, but in the Jewish tradition the word was transcribed with Hebrew letters and used for angels, prophets, and the ‘just’ - any advocate before God’s court. One things for sure, this advocate is a person of dynamism.

But then, all ‘life’ is dynamic. It is full of movement; graceful, clumsy, voluntary or involuntary movement. If we are made in the image and likeness of God, as it says in the book of Genesis, then perhaps our dynamic restlessness is not only a gift from God but is a feature of God’s self. The presence of God is described in various ways, ‘a rushing wind’, ‘a wind from God sweeping (or hovering) over the face of the waters.’

In John, the Spirit replaces Jesus, is an advocate and a witness, but also consoles the disciples, one who will encourage them to remember Jesus’ work and lead them to the whole truth.

‘…the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control… if we live by the Spirit, let us also be guided by the Spirit’ (Gal.5.22,25).

In fact the Chief actor in the historic mission of the Christian church is the Holy Spirit. He/She/It, is the director of the whole enterprise. The mission consists of the things it does in the world - in a special way it consists of the light that is focussed upon Jesus Christ.

This fact, so patent to Christians in the 1st century, is largely forgotten in our own. We’ve lost our nerve, our sense of direction, and the divine initiative has become human enterprise. But Jesus specifically forbade this – the disciples were not to go it alone – they were never to think that the mission was their responsibility. They were to plan nothing and just wait in Jerusalem:

‘It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set up by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you… (Acts 1.8)

We believe that God is love (1Jn.4.16b), and love, to be love, has to be dynamic: always moving between the lover and the beloved. Restlessness then, is not just a 20thc. dis-ease – it’s a feature of created life, and especially of a Christian life, because we’re all bound up in the restless love of God, our love for him, and for the God we can find in our neighbour (Tomkinson). In fact, the theologian Rolheiser describes ‘spirituality’ as ‘what we do with our unrest’ – he suggests that we all suffer from ‘a fundamental dis-ease, an unquenchable fire that renders us incapable, in this life at any rate, of ever coming to full peace (Rolheiser ‘98).’

If only we would know it, we are restless for intimacy with God. All our most secret desires are born out of this foundational feeling – trouble is we so often misunderstand this and think we can find our ultimate love in the safeties and securities of the material world. People mis-interpret their feelings and think that they’ll find happiness by placing their faith in money, or a new ‘thing’ they passionately want, or in themselves, or in someone else. They reject taking risks, anything that makes them feel uncomfortable – I don’t suppose God felt particularly comfortable watching his Son die on the cross.

We all need ‘things’ and loving relationships in this life, but never to the exclusion of others or our own spiritual needs; there’s a little bit of God in everyone, including ourselves, and any part that is not of God ‘groans inwardly’ as Paul puts it, for adoption, redemption, for hope. There’s only one being in which we can safely place our absolute faith, and that’s in the dynamic, restless God we’ve come to know and trust through Jesus, the God who sends his Spirit to remind us, in the words of St. Augustine, that, *‘You have made us for yourself, Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you.’* Amen.

Acts 2:1-21; Jn 15:26-27, 16:4b-15

Pentecost Homily 8:00 a.m. St. Andrew’s, Totteridge

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