

Pentecost 2020 St.Margaret of Antioch Leigh-on-Sea.
Acts 2.1-11, 1 Corinthians 12.3-7,12-13, John 20.19-23.



Open for business though not in the normal way.

For those of you who have taken the trouble to pass by the church this last couple of months you will notice our strapline from the pavement boards and notices. It certainly hasn't been normal but I hope you can reflect this Pentecost that you have helped to keep us as the church open for business.

This last week or so has seen some fine weather and some relaxation of lockdown rules – though behind remains a reality of much challenge, fear and dark forces blighting God's world.

I have observed much. Aside from observing the tyrannical evil and malign activities of the Chinese Communist Party, aside from the appalling behaviour of some American police and response of the highest authorities, aside from the hypocrisy of some of our political and church leaders, aside from the complete disconnect of our financial markets and many of the very wealthy with the plight of the real world; I risk sounding like Amos but aside from all that should prompt in us righteous anger – I have comforted myself by observing ordinary folk in our church garden and outside our closed church doors.

Our car park has become a children's play area and cycling proficiency probation zone. Our Centenary benches outside the closed west door have become an ideal spot for families seeing each other at a distance with cool bag and a packed lunch. Our herbs and lawns have been used by parishioners that have little space or none in their flats and confines. Many have used the phrase "a God-send" and it is heartening that in a small way our site has made visible being open when much of our business is unseen. And aside from some work maintaining – very little litter!

You will recall that last week I said how the time between Ascension and Pentecost was an in-between time. At Ascension we were reminded of our Lords instructions to stop wait and go. Stop in Jerusalem, wait for the Holy Spirit and then go into the World – to open the doors.

In Johns Gospel today we have yet another time when the disciples are behind closed doors. From the ascension we celebrated 10 days ago the church starts to look out beyond closed doors. The mission of Jesus is to open not close, to reveal things as they are – even in Amos like righteous anger, not hide them – that sin may be forgiven that the beauty of holiness may be revealed. The veil of the temple was torn in two at

Christ's crucifixion revealing his glory and the fullness of his reconciling mission. Revealing heaven to earth and offering the pain, sin and suffering of earth up to heaven.

For our Take, our profit, our benefit, Christ's human nature is taken up into heaven. Today for our sake profit and benefit we give thanks for the Holy Spirit.

It is the No.3 of feasts after Easter and Christmas and yet the other two would not be celebrated without it. God as Holy Spirit is active throughout history though I am not going to rehearse the appearance and actions throughout the Old Testament from the Spirit hovering over the waters. He is active in the narrative of the New Testament story, think of the annunciation the Holy Spirit comes to Mary. Yet she too will receive the Holy Spirit in a new way at Pentecost – remember she is there present with the disciples from last week's account of Acts in the upper room once more behind closed doors.

Now the doors will be opened and that hidden fellowship will go out into the world fulfilling the command of Jesus. What a sad irony that ours are still closed at this time. Yet we can still go out we can still be open – as I witness here and in what a few of you are doing. The disciples and the early fellowship had the closest of living and being in prayer and worship and now paradoxically they will increasingly disperse and see each other less and less but in the Spirit be ever closer. What bitter sweet resonances for us and challenges for us at this time?

We need always to remember two things about Pentecost – its call to be missionary and to be one in Christ.

In the Gospel of John and in the wonderful event of the Acts what is bestowed is the power and energy to continue the same creative reconciling work of Christ. He breathes on them as Adam receives breath, but Jesus is the Second Adam and the disciples will have within them the remedy of sin – the reconciling passion and death of Christ. Like food to survive the fight and win not a shield or cloak to avoid it. They must go out and the dangers and challenges will be great. The word receive is the same our lord uses elsewhere when he says **take** eat this is my body. What is disposed is the power energy and source to enact the same work of Christ and this is what we will see as Acts unfolds, healing, teaching, reconciling to the ends of the earth.

They are not given the spirit to have nice spiritual experiences, nor are they given the spirit to set up higher than other humans as a holier than thou club. As Adam is taken from the earth and breathed into, so are they and we; humility, our earthiness, grounded-ness, is at the heart of all. They and we are merely putting into practice implementing what Christ has achieved what he continues to achieve through his body. We preach Christ, we do not just repeat his words or teaching. It is about person

relationship and being. The mission of the church is to bring people into relationship with him not offering a checklist for living like the weekly Ocado drop.

This brings us to the second point of Pentecost that the work of the Church the Body of Christ is derived from the priestly work of Christ. It is not a solitary activity. The most cursory review of St.Paul speaking about the body and its many parts and gifts reveals this and should remind us of the humility of our calling. There is no hierarchy of function, race or class. Each is made in God's image and called to the same – just as Christ descended for all he ascended for all. The giving of the Spirit to the disciples and orders of the church can only be rightly understood in relation to Him who served, to him as priest offering himself, and now in relation to the universal mission of the Church.

If we are open to the Spirit we will remain open for business – Christ's business wherever we find ourselves. Amen.

***The Revd Fr.David Wylie RN
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