

## **Sermon for 6pm Healing Communion on the Feast of Pentecost**

### **Readings:**

Genesis 11.1-9

Acts 2.1-21

John 14.8-7

In the beginning, God created the world. And he filled it, so that the waters teemed with all kinds of swimming creatures, and the skies sang with all kinds of flying creature and the land squawked and squabbled, and roared and hooted and echoed with all kinds of creature that moved along the ground. The world was filled with all sorts of variety. And it was good.

And God created man and women. And they were good too.

And God told them to 'be fruitful and increase in number and fill the earth'.

Years later, after the Great flood, where the consequences of wickedness and sin had been made clear, God makes a promise to God's people – that God will never again destroy living creatures in this way. And for humanity's part, God blesses Noah and his family, telling them too to fill the earth. To go out and to spread into every part of the globe in God's name....

But the people of Babel were scared of being scattered over the face of the whole earth. They didn't want to follow God's command to be God's people across the globe. Instead they huddle together, speaking one language and fearing diversity. And so, because they are scared, they decide to build walls, higher and higher, so they don't need to go out into the world.

They build a tower, not so much to keep others out, but to keep themselves in, safe and secure. They make new bricks, so they can build higher and faster, and they look proudly at the heights they are reaching, and, as many have done since them, puff out their chests and smugly celebrate the name they are making for themselves. We can do anything, they thought, all by ourselves. We don't need God.

And so God, seeing yet another example of humanity ignoring God's commands, confuses their language. God injects the diversity and variety he had hoped for into the people, but, because of their arrogance and self-reliance, they discover they cannot understand each other. The diversity of language leads to division and the one thing that the people were scared of happening, happened; their relationships between them break down, the building project fails and they are scattered from there all over the earth.

Then years pass by.

Many, many years.

And now... Jesus has died, and risen from the dead, and ascended into heaven.

His followers are waiting on his promise.

As they wait, they pray constantly, because they know that without God, they can do nothing. They pray, because they are entirely dependent on God.

And in Jerusalem, the city where Jesus' followers gather together in one house, there is a huge diversity of people; some might be there on pilgrimage, others are immigrants, some are probably refugees. Between them there is a richness of old and young, well off and impoverished, a vast array of cultures and languages between them.

And when the day of Pentecost came, those who had followed Jesus were filled with the holy spirit and they began to speak in other tongues, as the Spirit enabled them. And the whole crowd who heard them were amazed, because they understood the Galileans.

Here, at Pentecost, the opposite of Babel happens. Here, at Pentecost, the differences between the hearers are sanctified. They are made holy. Despite their different languages, backgrounds and perspectives, they find that they are able to understand one another and, through Peter's scriptural guidance, find a common

purpose. And Peter's guidance (quoting the prophet Joel) itself celebrates diversity; with the promise of the Spirit for sons and daughters, young and old, slaves and free, men and women.

Unlike the experience of Babel; diversity does not bring disunity and unity does not require uniformity.

So what made the difference?

Reliance on God.

Reliance on God and the unifying and universal language of love and worship are what brought unity through diversity.

And reliance on God and the universal language of love and worship are also what bring us through our differences into new experiences of unity.

I don't know how many of you know Hans Christian Anderson's wonderful tale of the Snow Queen. In it, we are told of a mirror. It is a special mirror, designed by a troll, or a goblin, or perhaps even the devil himself. It is a mirror that distorts and shows everything at its very worst. The mirror takes everything that is good and lovely and shrinks it to nothing and it takes every bit of pain, every difference and every deformity and makes it look even worse. The devil loved that mirror; it made him laugh to see everyone in their worst light.

The devil loved it so much that he sent his goblins to take it up to heaven; nearer and nearer to God and the angels. But before it reached there it slipped from their hands, and as it tumbled to earth it shattered into millions of pieces. Then those pieces were scattered on the wind, they got caught in windows and looking glasses, in people's eyes and sometimes even in people's hearts.<sup>1</sup>

There is so much disagreement in the world at the moment. We build our walls and we hide in our towers.. So much disagreement..; in the world, in this country, sometimes in our homes and sometimes even in God's church.

And sometimes, when we disagree with each other, it is like those pieces of that devil's mirror have got caught in our own eyes and we can see only the worst in our brother and sisters...

And sometimes, like with the people of Babel, we don't even try to understand the language of the ones from whom we are different. We think the easiest way to deal with diversity, is either uniformity, conformity or scattering.

---

<sup>1</sup> Hans Christian Anderson, The Snow Queen

But tonight we sang....

O Spirit, clear our sight,  
all prejudice remove,  
and help us to discern the right,  
and covet only love<sup>2</sup>

The Holy Spirit has her own purpose, one of opening our spiritual eyes. And when that happens, the tears of realisation will wash away any grit from our eyes and will allow us to see the world and each other as God intends; full of diversity and awesome and wonderful beauty.

Jesus promised the his disciples that the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, would teach them everything and remind them of all that he said.

And as fellow children on God, if we rely on God, if we remember that we can only every do anything through the strength of Christ, then we are promised that comforter too. And if we allow her to speak through us, we will learn a new language; the universal language of love. And with that language of love, we can understand the perspective of those we differ from, we can find a common purpose and all things really can be transformed and made new.

---

<sup>2</sup> Come, Holy Spirit, Come – Michael Forster