

PENTECOST SUNDAY 2022
ST GEORGE'S WINDSOR

Some words from the Acts of the Apostles heard earlier in this service: “Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Capadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Lybia belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and Proselytes, Cretans and Arabs – in our own languages we hear them speaking about God’s deeds of power.”

And then, a few lines from a poem called Pentecost by Malcolm Guite:

“Today the Gospel crosses every border,
All tongues are loosened by the Prince of Peace.
Today the lost are found in his translation,
Whose mother tongue is love, in every nation.”

Perhaps we can keep these two quotations, separated from each other by about two thousand years, in the back of our minds while I deliver a very simple message on this Pentecost Sunday.

Today, the Feast of Pentecost, is sometimes known as the ‘Birthday of the Church’. We remember the occasion when, a while after Jesus had finally departed from their sight, a confused group of his disciples suddenly and quite dramatically, received some God-given inspiration to go out and give voice to the message of Jesus Christ about the love of God for all people. They discovered their purpose in life; a purpose that has shaped the lives of Christian disciples ever since.

The story, as recounted in the Acts of the Apostles, is rich in allusion. Anybody with a literary eye or ear, will be delighted at all the things that the storyteller Luke, the author of the Acts, hints at in the account that he has left with us. This morning, I shall pick on only one of his themes, his allusions, the things he hints at.

That theme can be identified early in his Gospel. Whereas Matthew, in his genealogy, his long list of Jesus’s ancestors, takes us back to Abraham, the Father of the Jewish people, Luke, in his genealogy of Jesus’s ancestors, takes us back to Adam, the Father of all humankind. Throughout the Gospel of Luke and his Acts of the Apostles, we are made aware of the ‘universal’ application of the message of Jesus.

So, our ears prick up when we are told that, on the Day of Pentecost, there were, living in Jerusalem, people from all over the world. The ‘world’ to which Luke draws our attention is of course geographically far smaller than any ‘world’ that we might have in mind, being more like a relatively small group of neighbouring nations. But, though the people of whom he speaks are Jews and Jewish converts, knowing Luke’s passionate belief in the universal application of the message of Jesus, we cannot but

be convinced that, in his mind, it was significant that they represented different cultures and traditions, and spoke different languages. And of course, their speaking different languages would, for those with ears to hear, signify the fact that they inhabited a post-Babel world (you will remember the myth of the Tower of Babel) in which human hubris had led to an inability of human beings to ‘understand’ one another.

However, it seems that, on that Day of Pentecost, many were able to hear and begin to understand the message of those early Christians; the message that there is but one God, that all people are God’s beloved children, and that the lengths to which God’s love for us will go have been shown in the life and death of Jesus Christ.

Perhaps it is not surprising that they should have begun to hear and understand what the disciples had to say. Maybe, buried deeply within the hearts of most of us, wherever we might come from and whoever we might be, there is a conviction that, as human beings, we shall never find real peace and happiness until we recognise our fundamental belonging to, and need of, one another in the human family.

The achievement of that state appears always to elude us; escape our grasp. The present situation in Ukraine is an ugly illustration of the waywardness and hardness that can cloud and shape the heart when pride and ambition stifle its better instincts. It is easy for us to lose hope for the future; easy for us to lose faith in the possible fulfilment of our shared, and maybe universal, dreams. We need so much encouragement if we are to live up to what we know to be the best in us, and the best for us.

At this time, we are celebrating the Queen’s Platinum Jubilee; Her Majesty’s seventy years on the throne. Our own Jubilee Service is to come this evening, but I cannot let this morning pass without some mention of The Queen on this special day.

Among the many, many things for which we give thanks is The Queen’s sense of family; not only her abiding loyalty to, and love for, those who are naturally closest to Her, but seen also in Her commitment to embrace, as one family, a diversity of people in this nation, the Commonwealth and far beyond. In times both good and bad, She has helped us to believe that, for all our differences, we belong together; that we need each other. She has encouraged us to treasure that heartfelt conviction that the future wellbeing of this world depends upon our remaining true to the belief that we are all God’s children, deserving of each other’s care, respect and love.

For that encouragement; for that reminder of what we know to be the best in us, and the best for us, we are genuinely grateful. Yet, even at the humblest level, for most of us it remains a struggle to care for, respect and love those whose behaviour, background and beliefs differ from our own.

On this Pentecost Sunday, let us pray most earnestly that we shall never cease to be inspired, as were those earliest disciples, by the Spirit of Jesus Christ to proclaim in word and deed his message of the love of God for all people. So perhaps, even in the course of our ordinary lives, we shall play a small but vital part in contributing to the healing of an all-too-divided world.

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