

Today is a special day; it's Pentecost, which by tradition is regarded as the church's birthday and many of us have already celebrated by munching on chocolate cake with our coffee.

Pentecost was the day, as you have heard, when the Holy Spirit blazed and swept its way through the gathered crowds as Peter spoke and this morning I want to continue our look at different aspects of what it means to becoming like Christ, and appropriately for today by being filled with the Spirit.

Let us first think about Jesus, undoubtedly the greatest man to have lived on earth. In the opening chapter of John's Gospel, we are told "He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him." (John 1:11)

As the gospel's story unfolds, we see that Jesus was either worshiped or whipped, followed or flogged, crowned or crucified. Jesus' presence prompts different responses. While hundreds of people thronged towards him in Galilee and Judea, his hometown people in Nazareth attempted to throw him off the cliff to kill him.

Next let us think of Paul, undoubtedly the greatest missionary of the early Christian Church. The Book of Acts tells us that the message he brought was either received with joy or ridiculed with jest. In fact, Paul himself was either embraced or embattled. Like the messenger, the gospel message acts like double-edged sword.

All of this becomes pointedly demonstrated on the Day of Pentecost. Reading through the events of that day in Jerusalem one word springs to mind – chaos.

Suddenly there's a sound like the rush of violent wind; tongues of fire appear out of nowhere; people start to speak in different languages yet all could be understood.

We can all image what the rush of a violent wind might sound like [mic noise] or tongues of flame [gas lighters] but what about a cacophony of different languages being spoken at the same time, yet being understood.

I couldn't find 20 or so people who were fluent in a second language, so instead I want to try and illustrate it in this way.....[multiple prayer groups praying out loud starting and ending at different times]

Put all three together and you can understand why there was bewilderment; there was amazement; there was ridicule ....they have had too much wine.

But that was simply chaos.

You've probably heard of the chaos theory, first developed in the 1960's as part of weather forecasting. You've also probably familiar with one of its illustrations...that when a butterfly in Brazil flaps its wings, a number of indeterminate sequences follows and culminates in a tornado somewhere in the world.

As a youngster, I learned this poem reputedly written by Benjamin Franklin:

"For want of a nail, a shoe was lost;

For want of a shoe, the horse was lost;  
For want of a horse, the rider was lost;  
For want of a rider, the message was lost;  
For want of a message, the battle was lost;  
For want of a battle, the kingdom was lost....

all for the want of a lost nail in a horse shoe, chaos ensued.

Our world seems to be a place of chaos.....just think back over the events of the past two weeks reported in our newspapers: the indiscriminate bombing of young people in Manchester; wholesale slaughter of worshippers at a Coptic church in Egypt;

catastrophic drought condition in Sudan causing thousands to slowly die through thirst; seventy five thousand BA passengers stranded throughout the world not knowing how or when they will reach their destination because a computer suffers a power failure....we live amidst chaos.

But I think the chaos of Pentecost is different – it is controlled chaos. Now that may sound like an oxymoron...how can chaos be controlled? If chaos is controlled, then it can no longer be chaotic.

The day of Pentecost is the day the disciples are filled with the Holy Spirit; symbolized in the text as wind and fire.....and it is in these two manifestations that we can see the principle of controlled chaos.

Wind under control, produces electricity – think wind farm – or cools our face with a fan. But wind OUT of control, is a tornado wreaking havoc and destruction to everything in its path.

Fire under control provides heat to warm us – think log fire – or a candle to light our way. But fire OUT of control is raging wildfire destroying everything in its path. On the day of Pentecost, violent winds are blowing and tongues of fire are burning....but they are under the control of the Holy Spirit.

Think back to those few weeks before and after Easter. Everything had seemed to be coming together in the words and deeds of Jesus. His teachings were powerful; he healed the sick; made the lame walk; the blind see; even restored life to his friend Lazarus.

Betrayal, arrest, crucifixion and the disciples flee in fear and terror. And even though Jesus rose again - chaos, not Christ reigns.....that is until, as we read in the gospel narrative they are filled with the peace of Christ.

And then on the day of Pentecost, the disciples, filled with the Spirit, start to feel the life force of Jesus flow through them. They are bold, they are excited; they speak in other languages, they are not drunk but on fire ....you could say they were on fire for God and three thousand are baptized on that one day.

And I think there is a lesson to be drawn from that special day we call Pentecost. Last week, Rogan emphasized that all believers have a personal relationship with God; primarily through one to one prayer.

I often non church goers say something like “I am spiritual not religious” or some of my friends who proclaim to be Christian “My faith is private and I don’t need to go to church.”

I think they are wrong. Yes, faith is always personal, but you can never be a Christian on your own; collective worship is integral to the teaching of the bible. We have been called to be the body of Christ; to meet in fellowship and support each other in love.

During the week, regardless of what work we do – in school, office, workplace or even in our own home we are faced with all kinds of challenges and temptations that leave us spiritually drained. And when we come to Church our faith can and should be renewed and recharged, just like a mobile phone needs to be recharged.

Recently, a friend said to me that I was looking very tired and a bit washed out, they were sure that it was as a result of the extra workload I’d taken on during the vacancy and suggested no one would notice if I skipped a Sunday or two. My immediate thought was...I bet God would notice.

But the truth of the matter is that I differentiate between duty and passion. I do not come to church because it is my duty to do so; I come because I am passionate about serving God to the best of my ability and that ability is dependent upon my faith battery being fully charged.

My faith is recharged each and every time I come to worship in this church so Sundays are planned around going to church, not fitting church in along with other things.

I know I’m not alone in feeling this way; there are a number of you present today who are also passionate about attending and serving this church; just in the same way as those first disciples did after being filled with the Holy Spirit at the first Pentecost.

Every week, we pray in the name of Jesus and invite the Holy Spirit to dwell and work in us to understand that good news, more deeply and more clearly.

It is a privilege to be asked to preach but it also quite humbling to think that Peter preached on the first Pentecost and three thousand people became followers of Christ and here am I on what may be the 1984<sup>th</sup> birthday of that sermon struggling to find the right words to say.

But the one thing of which I am certain is that the message Peter proclaimed to those gathered in Jerusalem that day is the same that I am trying to deliver this morning.....the good news of Jesus Christ.....the good news of how we can become more like Christ when filled with the Holy Spirit.