

READINGS. Acts 2:1-21 Psalm 104:24-34 1 Corinthians 12:3b-13 John 20:19-23

Reflection – *The Banners of Pentecost*

One of the things which has happened in many churches over the last 30 years or so, is the use of Banners to enhance the worship space. Almost every church has at least one or two, sometimes on display throughout the year or changed as the Christian year changes. Or perhaps for a particular Sunday or event.

When I began my ministry in Carnoustie Panbride in 1989, the two church buildings we used had no banners at all. A couple of years later, the Sunday School children made two simple banners depicting the two church buildings for use at their Prizegiving service in June. That year, the Summer Sunday Club project was to make two banners which would be hung from the gallery on Harvest Sunday depicting the harvest of land and sea, both of which were important to our congregation.

These were the starting points for a group of talented ladies in the congregation forming a Banner Group which over the years, resulted in an amazing series of banners which were used to great effect. They produced banners illustrating the hymn “All things bright and beautiful”, a banner behind the organist encouraging us to “Make a joyful noise”, another illustrating the hymn “Let us build a house”. There were banners which were used at Baptisms, Weddings, Funerals, Remembrance Sunday, as well as pulpit falls and Banners for Advent and Christmas. The final series of Banners illustrated the “I am” sayings and Pentecost and were completed in time for my final year before retirement.



The small banners were placed around the church on window ledges – a visual demonstration of the spreading of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost – and the larger one placed on a panel beside the old organ pipes and visible to the whole congregation. The colours are vibrant, to illustrate the wonder and amazement of that first Day of Pentecost.

Pentecost, or the gift of the Holy Spirit is seen by historians and theologians as the birth of the church. The two texts from the readings in St John’s Gospel and the Book of Acts are different in time and experience, yet they share central truths that help us understand how the Holy Spirit moves in our lives today.



The breath of God which came to that upper room, also visits each of us. We are filled with that same breath of God. Sometimes, we ignore it. Sometimes we allow it to move us. No matter what we do, the wind of God, the breath of God dwells in us.



The breath of God, the wind of God is powerful. We associate breath as a gentle warming action, the breath of God, the Spirit of God came to give power to the church. We have images of the wind which has caused chaos in recent days as the Cyclone Amphan destroyed vast areas of Kolkata and southern Bangladesh.

However, the wind of God came to earth not to destroy, but to

it came to earth so that Peter and the others were compelled to leave that upper room and go into the highways and preach.

The breath of God moves us to go beyond the safe.

The coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost tells of a power of God that is anything but safe.

We see this power whenever people stand up for justice and equality whenever oppressive and dehumanising systems and structures are brought down. It may be that if we believe in the power of God, we will have to allow God's spirit to wreak some chaos – into our complacency, into our assumptions, perhaps into our churches.

Pentecost is a day to be challenged and also to be changed. No longer were the disciples confused; now they understood the plan completely.

No longer were they timid; now they were confident, speaking publicly.

This is the same Peter who two months earlier was so afraid for his own life that he had denied that he even knew Jesus, never mind being one of his followers.

Now he was speaking in public to the crowd with confidence and an understanding that he had never had before. Peter did not simply change his mind, he himself was changed. Along with the other disciples they boldly went to change the world.

There was another change that took place on Pentecost, and you could argue that this change was more spectacular than what happened to the disciples. After Peter preached his sermon on Pentecost, 3000 people came to faith and were baptised.

We don't know much about these people. We do know that Jerusalem was packed with people, because of the Festival of Pentecost. Jews from all over the Roman Empire came. 3000 of them who were not Christians, who did not believe in Jesus Christ, were changed that day.

Their whole way of looking at God, at themselves, at the world, at eternal life – everything had changed. Now they knew that they were at peace with God. Now they knew that Jesus was their Saviour.

It goes without saying our world today needs change. We are asked to change from spectators to active disciples, from watching other people do things to be those leading the change.

On our own we cannot do it; following our own agenda we will fail. We need first to acknowledge and accept the power of the Holy Spirit and move by its prompting and guiding.

Remember that Jesus tells the disciples that they need the power of the Holy Spirit.

Even spending three years in His presence was not enough to equip them for the work that lay ahead.

The gift of the Holy Spirit means action. It is not given to us so that we might feel good but so that we are equipped for a task. Not so that we can be better spiritually but so that we can carry out that great commission and witness to the ends of the earth.