

START:STOP – Tuesday 2 June 2020

Hello and welcome to our start stop reflection. As last Sunday was Pentecost our reflection today is on Pentecost and Pentecostalism. Our reading is Sunday's set reading from chapter 2 of the book of Acts – the first 11 verses.

When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. ² And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. ³ Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. ⁴ All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.

⁵ Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. ⁶ And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each. ⁷ Amazed and astonished, they asked, "Are not all these who are speaking Galileans?" ⁸ And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language? ⁹ Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, ¹⁰ Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, ¹¹ Cretans and Arabs—in our own languages we hear them speaking about God's deeds of power."

Reflection

The dramatic growth in global Christianity through the twentieth century has been driven by the dynamic expansion of churches with Pentecostal affiliations. Such growth has been particularly notable in South America, Africa and parts of South East Asia. From comprising around 6% of those identifying as Christians in the 1970s, Pentecostals now comprise around 20% - around 400-500 million.

Central to Pentecostalism is the celebration and reliance on the ongoing outpouring of the Holy Spirit that transformed the apostles at the first Pentecost, as we heard in the reading from Acts. On conversion, the believer is baptised in the Holy Spirit and becomes an agent for displaying the gifts of the Spirit – in Greek the *charismata* – particularly speaking in tongues, healing, prophecy.

Flashes of Pentecostalism appeared in primitive Methodism, notably the strangely warming of the heart of John Wesley at St Mary Aldersgate on 24 May 1738. As Martyn Percy the theologian puts it, this warming of the heart eventually led to tongues of fire in the early twentieth century most significantly at the Azusa Street revival in Los Angeles from 1906 to 1915. The background to this was a developing prayerful yearning in several parts of the world around the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries for revival, a dissatisfaction with traditional religion and a desire to recapture a religion of the heart.

Charles Fox Parham, the head of Bethel Bible college in Kansas, firmly believed that the church needed renewal through outpouring of the gifts of the Holy Spirit and exhorted his followers to pray, fast, study the scriptures and wait for the work of the Spirit. William Seymour, a preacher, developed these ideas at the mission in LA that moved to a building previously used as stables in Azusa Street. There, he and a group mixed in race, status and

gender experienced the power of the Spirit and spoke in tongues – the glossalia that Paul refers to – speaking spontaneously, ecstatically and fluently in an unintelligible language. The Azusa Street mission grew instantly and rapidly and members experienced what they understood to be frequent experiences of the power of the Spirit.

Worshippers at Azusa Street were very diverse – men, women, children, several ethnic groups, wealthy, poor, educated and illiterate at a time when racial segregation was strictly imposed and over a decade before women's suffrage.

The LA times was sneering in its review:

Meetings are held in a tumble-down shack on Azusa Street, and the devotees of the weird doctrine practice the most fanatical rites, preach the wildest theories... Colored people and a sprinkling of whites compose the congregation, and night is made hideous in the neighborhood by the howlings of the worshippers....deep-seated racist attitudes that the USA continues to battle with.

But as Martin Percy observes: there can be no denying that God is trying to say something to the Church and the world through this movement; for in Azusa Street we have "A-Z, USA" spelt out: the Spirit has indeed given us a sign. Pentecostalism is, arguably, one of America's most successful exports.

The group developed a fervent missionary zeal and the Pentecostal movement spread from Azusa Street across the USA, into India and across the world without the support of a head office, big financial backers, trained clergy or a codified theology. Pentecostalism has been adapted and developed in different ways in different countries and cultures such that there is now an extraordinary variety of churches affiliated to Pentecostalism, but the influence of the essence of Azusa Street is common to most. Compared to what was seen by many as either arid traditional religion or bland evangelicalism, Pentecostal worship was not led by leaders of a superior class, was spontaneous, joyous, provides a strong community and features much vibrant, engaging action including speaking tongues, healings, anointing, prayer. This colour and the vision of the heavenly city has enabled countless worshippers to appreciate the power of the Spirit and to lift their eyes above their daily struggles.

Music has always been important and Pentecostalism has provided a very fertile ground for developing music and musicians particularly jazz, blues, gospel and rock and roll. Elvis Presley, Jerry Lee Lewis and Little Richard all grew up with and were formed by Pentecostal worship and music.

From a mainstream Anglican perspective, we may feel a little squeamish about aspects of out-there Pentecostal worship, we may disagree with the more literal biblical interpretation of many Pentecostalists, we may think that there is over-emphasis on the Spirit at the expense of the other persons of the Trinity but there is so much we can learn from the celebration of the ongoing presence of Jesus in his world through his active, fiery spirit, from the need to maintain high levels of joy and vibrancy in worship and from the commitment to spreading the gospel to the ends of the earth. We all must be charismatic...in our own varied ways.

We have some moments of silence before our prayers

Prayers

The response to our prayers is:
Come, Holy Ghost, our souls inspire
and lighten with celestial fire;

At the close of this Easter season we thank God that
Jesus Christ, whom we worship, is our crucified, risen and ascended Lord.
We have walked with him through his journey of love.
We have faced the agony of his suffering and death on a cross.
We have rejoiced at his bursting free from the bonds of death.
We have enjoyed his risen presence with us
and his revelation of himself through the breaking of bread.
We have seen his return to the throne before which every knee shall bow
and every tongue confess that this Jesus is Lord.
And now, with the followers of his own time,
we await the coming of the promised Holy Spirit, his gift to his people,
through whom we make Christ known to the world.

We pray for your church born and baptised with the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. We pray for a
Pentecostal experience that divided tongues of fire will touch all members of your church in
in the weeks and months ahead; that we shall learn to listen to one another's languages,
experience and insight with all the enthusiasm and eagerness with which we would listen to
God's own Word. May we grow together as diverse but united church making your priorities
our priorities. Creator and Father God
Give light, learning, wisdom and instruction to your people

We pray for all those who in suffering in any way...those affected by the Coronavirus...those
who are anxious, fearful of the future. We pray for all those close to us close to us – our
families, friends, neighbours, work colleagues, praying especially for those in a particular
need. Father, bring healing, light, hope and true abundant life through your spirit..

O Lord, from whom all good things come:
grant to us your humble servants,
that by your holy inspiration
we may think those things that are good,
and by your merciful guiding may perform the same;
through our Lord Jesus Christ,

The blessing of God Almighty, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit be with you and all
whom you love today and always.

Amen.

Many thanks for joining us. Do join us for Morning prayer tomorrow Wednesday at 9am by conference call and share in our sung eucharist for Pentecost by watching the video which will be released on Saturday. God bless, take care.