**RCL YEAR B PENTECOST May 23, 2021**

Something happens. An event, an occurrence, a phenomenon. This prompts a question: what does this mean? Which leads to an interpretation of the event. An event. A question. An interpretation.

The event: about 120 followers of Jesus are gathered together in an upper room in Jerusalem fifty days after the Passover festival, and the resurrection of Jesus. They’re still there in Jerusalem, and it is time for another festival and the city again is filled with pilgrims from all over the known world. Gathered in prayer, the believers are waiting as the risen Jesus had instructed them to wait before he ascended into heaven; waiting to be empowered by the Holy Spirit.

Then it happens – something happens, difficult to put into words – the sound of a mighty wind, literally a spirit blowing among them, and appearing as tongues of fire; they are filled with the Spirit of God, and they begin to speak, to sing, to recount the mighty works of God – the God who created the earth and the heavens and all that is in them, God the source and origin of life in all its diversity, God who delivered them from slavery in Egypt and exile in Babylon; who sent his Son into the world, who healed the sick, brought eyesight to the blind, forgiveness of sins, restored the dignity of the fallen, spoke truth to power (and paid the price), and rose again from the dead.

It must have caused quite a stir, especially first thing in the morning – a crowd begins to gather – the sound of the wind and of all these people speaking at once, and spilling out onto the street, coming up to complete strangers, foreign visitors to the city, and addressing them in their own language. Which prompts the question: What does this mean? Are they drunk? Are they crazy? What has got into them?

Then Peter stands to give the interpretation: drawing on words from an ancient prophet speaking in a very different time and in a very different situation, and yet the words seem to have a deeper, more universal, meaning: “In the last days it will be, God declares, that *I will pour my spirit out on all flesh*….” Male and female, old and young, slave and free. All flesh. All humanity. In the last days – *ultimately* – God’s Spirit, God’s life, is for all. For all. Not just a chosen people – but chosen to be a blessing to all, so that all may come to see themselves and know themselves as God’s people, Divine children, all one in the Spirit, from every tribe and language, race and nation.

So that everyone – everyone – who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. Saved – rescued, restored, redeemed, made whole, forgiven. No longer fearing whatever it is that we fear, because God’s Spirit, the breath of Divine life, is for all, and so all are invited to participate in this Divine dance of life in which all are included and there is room for all. A community of love.

The opening chapters of the Book of Acts paints an idyllic picture of the early church, and we might be tempted to ask: what went wrong? Why couldn’t it be like this all the time? They loved one another, they shared things in common, those who had more shared with those who had less, from each according to their ability to each according to their need.

As a young person I attended the summer camps at Lee Abbey in Devon, England. There were about 120 campers aged 16-25 including a team of about 30 people who ran the camp– most similar in age to the campers. The thing about the camp that attracted me and so many others and kept us coming back was that for those two weeks in the summer it was as if we were living and experiencing that life of the early church. The warmth of welcome when we arrived; the feeling of acceptance and love for all; the shedding of fears and insecurities, this was a safe place; the fun, the laughter, the hilarity, the teaching, the worship, the singing, the porridge, the ambiance, the vitality. Why couldn’t church be like this? Why couldn’t it be like this all the time?

At the Eucharist on the last evening of the camp, I remember we were always reminded that this was a “mountaintop experience,” and that we should be prepared for things not necessarily to be like this at the churches we were returning to. And yet we also knew that the experience of camp would nourish and sustain us for many months to come as we returned to the reality of our everyday lives, many of us to crusty old Church of England parishes. Camp offered us a picture of how things could be, of life in the Spirit, of what the church really is about when you strip everything else away: love and inclusion for all, acceptance and forgiveness, peace and justice.

That’s how I feel about the Day of Pentecost. It offers a glimpse, a picture of what the church really is and what it is really all about. In the last days – *ultimately*, when all is said and done – God’s Spirit, God’s life, is for all. Every human being is a child of God, and that has implications for how we treat each other. It doesn’t mean we magically find ourselves effortlessly living out an idyllic life of love, peace, and harmony like we experienced on that hallowed cow field in Devon. But in all the challenges and tribulations of our lives it holds before us an ultimate reality, an ultimate reality that we are called and invited (perhaps even compelled?) to bring into being through the power and action of God’s Spirit living and working in us and through us.

*Angus Stuart*