

Pentecost Sunday 2021

Acts 2:1-21, Ps 104:26-36, Romans 8:22-27, John 15:26-27, 16:4b-15

We live in interesting times! As we have become so much more aware of each other, and therefore aware of our diversity in a myriad of ways, there have been glimpses of reconciliation as folk have been liberated from prejudice and discrimination. Much has been achieved, that much is true, but there is another side to all this, one that is disturbing. We are always in a state of change and flux that much is true. Even a very amateur historian can trace movements in society be they the agricultural or industrial revolution, the enlightenment or the coming of the scientific age. Today we are in the midst of a digital revolution which is changing the way that we think and feel and importantly the way we interact. Never before have we been able to communicate so freely with folk in other parts of the world, across language and culture, race and creed. Yet these means also reveal a dark under belly of hate and division.

At the opening and conclusion of many Christian gatherings we say together the Grace, that ancient Christian benediction at the close of St Paul's second letter to the Corinthians, 'The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all evermore. Amen.' Our Bibles generally translate the word fellowship as 'communion,' another translation of the Greek word Koinonia, a really rich word: fellowship, association, community, communion, joint participation, intercourse; in the New Testament as in classical Greek it is about an intimate sharing, a participation 'in' something beyond us.

It is this Koinonia that we see experienced in the Pentecost event in our famous reading today from Acts. '*When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place.*' This gathering from every part of the known world was the trigger for the bestowal of the Spirit. Suddenly Koinonia, fellowship, communion, participation becomes the order of the day and the Church is born. This is the antidote to the prejudice and rivalry that so mars the human condition. The digital age has the potential to overcome such faults but also to perpetuate the evils of discrimination and division. Koinonia works when we *gather*, when we *share*, when we *participate*. And as we heard today not just people of differing languages cultures and nationalities, but as Peter reminded us the gathering the Spirit moves in and through your daughters as well as your sons (radical). It impacts the young and the seniors, even upon slaves, both men and women (even more radical). We find here the complete gamut of humanity, every gender, class and age group and so the Church is born. There is no room for the discrimination born out of the isolation of the digital age, the trolling and hatred born out of fear of difference, the division born out of the misunderstanding and misinformation that comes with 280 characters.

Paul takes us further into this great mystery of the Church in the Spirit. It is not just our bodies but our very souls that are called into Koinonia he describes the language of the spirit as 'sighs too deep for words.' This is where our deeply held, hopes, dreams and fears are given voice. This is the reconciliation of spirits, Christs and ours are made one, where our mature prayers are those of Christ and this brings us here to Koinonia, to our gathering and to this liturgy.

But there's still more! Think of the dismissal: Give us grace to go thankfully and with courage in the power of your Spirit. This Koinonia has an impact on the world in which we live. Many of things that we have taken for granted are being questioned. Once again the wonder of the digital age is giving everyone a voice. We are experiencing a democratisation of knowledge and the opportunity to be heard. But again there is a price; dissenting views are shut down, many claim that freedom of speech is endangered. Surely the Pentecost experience demands that every voice is heard, *each one heard them speaking in the native language of each*. Increasingly those with different views are viewed as enemies, surely a threat to democracy, which must be more than simply winners and losers. Is not Koinonia an antidote to political partisanship and ideological battlefields? A thorough-going theology of Pentecost which is lived out in Koinonia is something that the Church offers to democracy. People participating, hearing one another and listening.

We are only truly ourselves, only really alive, only truly human when the breath of God's Spirit is within us, which is really what the Psalmist is telling us. And we are only really our true selves, truly human when we are in Koinonia, and we are only in Koinonia when we are together reflecting God's glory. It finds its ground when we are at worship, in communion, participating in the Spirit. And it is lived out in society, Koinonia is a sacrament of society, or a metaphor perhaps; it points to what a flourishing society is like.

In midst of the dense text of the gospel passage we heard this morning we can find this sense of the Spirit coming to us. It is both a challenge and a comfort, Koinonia is that spirit at work. John calls that spirit 'paracletos' the encourager, the one who advocates for the other. This is what community in the spirit looks like. This is the challenge of the Pentecost event. It begins here at worship and spills out as that worship becomes a lived experience as dignity for all; as all are given true worth as we hear and advocate for one another.

'The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the Koinonia of the Holy Spirit be with us all evermore. Amen.'