

Sermon 23 May 2021 Pentecost

I have never been a fan of TV reality shows, but when I was staying in a hotel after a long day visiting my mother-in-law in hospital, I switched the TV to relax but nothing caught my eye. I settled eventually on Strictly Come Dancing, thinking I'd enjoy the music at least, while Roger read the paper. It wasn't long before I started actually watching the show and when Roger put his newspaper down, I knew he too was hooked. We watched as participants left their comfort zone and became brave enough to perform before judges, a live audience and millions of people watching at home. These contestants were skilled in their own field, just as we are, yet here they were bravely displaying their humanity. Fears, tears and frustration, exhilaration, hope and joy.

The full gamut of human emotion was there for all to see.

Looking at our bible readings, we come across another bunch of people out of their comfort zone who find themselves similarly exposed in a challenging scary situation, at the forefront of a live performance before hundreds of people.

Even though the disciples had witnessed miraculous things whilst following Jesus, they were still uncertain of themselves, they felt scared and alone. Jesus had been crucified, they had witnessed his Ascension back to his Father in heaven, but now 50 days on from his death, they were still bereft with no idea what would happen next. What drama lay ahead they were soon to find out, We know what it is and I hope you are excited by it, as I am. The arrival of the Holy Spirit, in the power of fire and hurricane touched everyone present and released the talent within them to enable them to speak all the languages of the known world at the time.

These humble, uneducated folk from Galilee, a cultural back-water, who were mocked for their local accent were suddenly talented enough to communicate with people from every part of the Roman Empire. Here they were emerging from the ranks of amateurs bumbling through the first steps of a dance, to emerge as confident artists in their own right, all charged with the purpose to reach out to everyone and tell the good news of Jesus Christ.

Through the gift of the Holy Spirit, God's Advocate on earth, the disciples were changed into people of confidence and courage.

The knowledge that God was with them, enabled them to stand before thousands of people and talk about their faith in the scriptures, the love of God and the promise of eternal life..

The same Peter who denied knowing Jesus, stood aloft and announced that the wind, the fire, and the change in the disciples, was due to the coming of God's Holy Spirit to restore confidence and courage to his people. Such was the power of the speeches, three thousand converted to the new Christianity immediately.

The power of the happenings at Pentecost may seem extreme, but amazing things happen when we open ourselves up to the Holy Spirit. We find we no longer rely on our own strength because the strength of God inhabits us, guiding and showing the way to become the people God knows we can be.

We all have times of struggle when we question our abilities and are honest about our limitations, probably, none of us would make good candidates for Strictly Come Dancing. Not many of us could stand in front of lots of people and talk about our love of God, but we all have more to offer than we give ourselves credit for. The Holy Spirit, given to us through baptism, comes to us all in different ways and we are encouraged to use that power together to further God's kingdom on earth.

The Benefice of Cogenhoe and Great Houghton and Little Houghton with Brafield on the Green

We may have had “flames of fire” moments when God has spoken to us, we could share those moments with others. Our experience may be more of a quiet calm, guiding us to a way of truth, talk about them.

The Holy Spirit working in us enables us to leave our comfort zone and to take risks and be outward-looking in order to bring others to know God. Because here’s the reality, our faith is not our own private possession, to be kept in a cupboard and brought out only on a Sunday.

It is to be lived joyfully and daily in public through our selfless actions, and our words, spoken in language that that others will hear and understand. Our faith in Jesus Christ makes us who we are, it defines us as people who live to make a difference to the lives of others, and we do that with the help of the Holy Spirit.

Today we celebrate the birth of the Christian church, and my prayer for us all is that we be filled with the Holy Spirit to empower us to change our world, just as the original disciples changed theirs. Amen

Reverend Irene