

Sunday 28th May – Pentecost Sunday

Acts 2:1-21

1 Cor 12:3b-13

John 20:19-23

I was flipping through my diary the other day looking to see what was coming up when I noticed that Saturday 17th June, as well as it being the date of our next Messy Church, is also the King's Birthday. That's a bit strange, I thought, I am sure he was born in November – I know that as he shares the date with Kate.

Turns out that yes his proper birthday is in November, but that a monarch can choose an official birthday as well on whatever date they want! Who knew? So the King has opted for a day in the middle of summer rather than the grey November day on which he has celebrated for the last 70 odd years. Clearly he always wanted a Pimms on the lawn birthday party and now he has the chance! Makes me wonder when I might choose my official birthday if I had the choice.

Why am I talking about birthdays?

Because today is what we call Pentecost Sunday – the day we remember the coming of the Holy Spirit to those first disciples (as we just heard in the reading from Acts) – and it is sometimes known as the birthday of the church. Because it is really the day the mission of the church began.

so what is the church?

Is it the building (the church is on the corner of Stratford Rd)

Is it the institution (the church of England)

is it the profession (he/she has gone into the church)

is it what we do on Sundays (I am going to church)

In fact its the people - whenever we read about church in the Bible it means the people

That reading from Acts is one that always fills me with excitement and anticipation. The transformation of a motley crew of scared and uncertain fishermen, tax collectors and other ordinary folk into a team of confident, outward looking and courageous people with a mission to preach the good news of Jesus to everyone. A transformation that could only be attributed to the power of God at work in them through his Holy Spirit. As if they had God himself with them. A transformation, then, from a group of frightened individuals to a powerful body of believers – the very first church.

Peter was filled with the Holy Spirit, he stood up and preached to the crowds in Jerusalem and 3000 people became believers and joined the church – they became part of the community of those who were believers. Amazing. A real time for celebration!

The story continues after today's reading of course. We read of growing numbers of people coming to believe in Jesus, we read of the message being preached far beyond Jerusalem; we read of the pharisee Saul who vehemently opposed this message being preached himself encountering Jesus,

changing his name to Paul, joining the church and becoming a great preacher. We read about his journeys throughout the region creating new groups of believers in towns and cities. New groups that in each place were known as churches, made up of believers who became known as Christians – those following the way of Jesus Christ. And we read that all this was happening only because those first believers and the ones that followed were all filled with God's Holy Spirit. God himself was living in each of them, helping them, encouraging them and equipping them to speak boldly about what they believed and welcome more people into the churches.

And the promise for each of us is the same - that Holy Spirit can come to us, can live in us and can enable us to live the lives God wants us to live. Can help build us and our churches up to live out and speak out the message of Jesus.

Certainly something worth celebrating.

In the other reading today – the reading from one of Paul's letters to the church (there's that words again) in Corinth we read about the picture Paul uses for a church.

Paul says the church is a bit like a body. Our human bodies are made up of different parts. Hands, feet, legs, stomach, ears, eyes, mouth and so on. Each essential to the health and well being of the body as a whole. We need them all.

Each member of the church has a different role to play within the community of the church. People who look after the building, those who pray and listen to God, those who make tea, coffee and cake, those who lead worship, those who speak God's word, those who encourage our children and younger people; those who play music, those who look out for people, visit them and care for them; those who teach about the faith, those who make sure the finances are in order, those who work behind the scenes to print magazines and make sure the bills are paid. and so on

And its not simply a case of choosing which role we want. The reading from 1 Corinthians makes it clear that we are given gifts by God's Spirit – that we are equipped by the Spirit – to do certain things. Things, roles that are essential to the well being and mission of the church.

Sometimes its very easy to spot other peoples gifts. Caring gifts, speaking gifts, music gifts, baking gifts - whatever. But much harder to spot our own. Perhaps we need to listen to each other to help us see what our particular gifts are and how we can use them within the church, within the body. How we can play our part fully – not for our own benefit but for the benefit of the whole church and the mission of the church. How we can use the gifts that God through his Spirit has given us. And perhaps if you can see someone else's gift that perhaps they are not aware of, why don't you tell them. It's such an encouragement!

So as we celebrate the church's birthday today why not think for a moment about how we can contribute to the life and health of the church here in Shirley. Have we got gifts we can offer? Perhaps we are not sure what those gifts are – please have a conversation with me and we can talk about that.

But please don't be afraid of coming forward and offering yourself. Your gifts have been given to you by God through his Spirit not to lock away but to use.