

SERMON PENTECOST 2024 TG: **THE POWER OF THE SPIRIT** dtw

One of my favourite humorous poems is by Jeremy Lloyd called *Oliver the Octopus*.

*Oliver the Octopus
with eyes as big as plates
sits in his underwater cave
and waits and waits and waits
He lives just off the Isle of Mull
where soft backed crabs are plenty
But it's not food he's waiting for
You see his life is empty
There is no lady Octopus
to share his cares and woes
The reason is that Oliver
can't see beyond his nose
Short sighted to the nth degree
on touch alone reliant
he searches with his tentacles
all long and strong and pliant*

*Just above this hidey hole
so dark and deep and cold
there rose a cliff and on its brow
a kilted piper strolled
A sad lament snatched by the wind
upon his pipes he played
Then upon a stone he slipped
threw up his arms and swayed
and like a tartan windmill
he wobbled to and fro
and gazed in horror as his bagpipes
vanished down below*

*They sank and landed by the cave
A tentacle soon found them
and then another two or three
which wrapped themselves around them
And then they disappeared inside
Now Oliver's delighted
It's amazing how true love can last
when you really are short sighted*

Someone once said that if the Holy Spirit was removed from the institutional church, at least 85% of its worship, activities and programs would still continue. What that means is that most of our church life is ordered human activity – organised by people – for people. We use the word 'planning' a lot, and there's nothing essentially and practically wrong with that. But we can easily develop the language of 'running the church' instead of *being* the people of God, inspired,

equipped and empowered...a people on a journey, a people far sighted; wide-visioned, big picture people, searching ever onwards. Searching for our true love, our first love, may we encourage others to come with us, for we have found our heart's desire! *Hope 25* is being launched all around our nation today. It is all about this – sharing our hope in Jesus with others,

The Feast of Pentecost reminds us that the Church of God was born of the Spirit, a Spirit who often moves in ways that we don't expect and can't predict. The Church's vision is born of the Holy Spirit. In the Revelation to John we find in the 2nd chapter a message to the Church of Ephesus, apparently very active, but perhaps institutionally bogged down. 'I know your works, your toil, your patient endurance...but...you have abandoned your first love...let anyone who has an ear listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches. When I was in NZ for a conference a good number of years ago now, I was thrilled to see in their Prayer Book an alternative response to their readings in the Liturgy. Most of us are used to *Hear the Word of the Lord* or *For the Word of the Lord*. They also say *Hear what the Spirit says to the Church*. (*Thanks be the God*)

I want to take you now to that first Pentecost Day experience as recorded in Acts 2. Imagine the packed crowd of pilgrims from all over the Mediterranean world – there at Jerusalem for this special Jewish Feast. Jesus' disciples were all together in one place – very much in a shut-in mode still. Jesus had departed from them. They were waiting, perhaps quite anxious, looking to their own resources, in their own little cave. Suddenly there is the sound like the rush of a mighty wind – the apostles are strangely moved – they begin to speak in other tongues as the Spirit moves them. Meanwhile the huge crowds hear one another telling in their own native languages the mighty works of God. This is not your average Sunday morning scene! They are filled with a new life – a new breath. Some even think they're drunk and it's only nine o'clock in the morning. In fact, they are intoxicated with the Holy Spirit. These outward manifestations weren't that important in themselves. What was important then, and what is important today, is that they revealed an overwhelming sense of change and renewal in the lives of ordinary people and in the corporate life of the believing church. And it is an infectious change – people want it for themselves. You will find all this and more in Acts 2: new life, repentance, devotion to apostolic teaching, fellowship, the breaking of bread, a new prayer life, community spirit, care, evangelism. The Church quite simply discovered its True Love at Pentecost, its very reason for being. Anything less than this is a poor substitute, about as useful in making Christians as bagpipes in making octopuses!

Apostolic Tradition alone does not make a Church. Apostolic Succession alone does not make a Church. Apostolic Faith alone does not make a Church. What *is* decisive is that the Church lives by the living power of the Spirit of God. Charles Kingsley put it, "I don't want merely to possess a faith, I want a faith that possesses me." This is Pentecost. Without it the church is breathless. May the Holy Spirit take hold upon our lives and our Church. Hymn writer, Elizabeth Smith offers this:

*God gives us a future,
Daring us to go
Into dreams and dangers
On a path unknown.
We will face tomorrow
In the Spirit's power,
We will let God change us,
For new life starts now.*