

One in the Spirit

Pentecost Sunday 2020

Benefice

Readings

Acts 2: 1-21

1 Cor 12:3-13

John 20: 19-23

+ *In Nomine*

I feel rather sad as I look back to Pentecosts past in this Benefice. It has become one of our traditions to shift our Pentecost Eucharist from the church building to the school hall. Our 'community' is enlarged that day, with children and families from the village schools, along with grandchildren and others joining in. The Eucharist is less formal, with the children telling the story of Pentecost and leading various parts of the service – Confession, readings, intercessions along with serving at the altar. Who can forget the Confession with a bang - sins written on touch paper disappearing in a ball of flame – very Pentecostal, or the 'Pass the parcel' sermon where the children taught everyone about the 'fruits of the Spirit'. The music was lively and joyful, with lots of different 'instruments' and clapping – I think there were even congregation members dancing in the aisles! At the end we'd all celebrate the Church's birthday in the traditional way – with lots of cake.

What a different world we inhabit this year. Churches and schools are shut and services are now on-line. This can be both inclusive and exclusive – inclusive in that anyone with a computer and the appropriate Zoom link can join in if they so choose but it's exclusive too, especially of many of our older congregation members who do not use computer technology and who are missing the 'live' community which we enjoy when meeting together in 'real' time in our church buildings.

I guess this has prompted me to think about community. What is it? How is it constituted? What has the feast of Pentecost got to do with community?

Our word community originates in both the Latin – **communio** – to share in or to participate in or more specifically **in commune** – meaning for the public good or common use and the Greek **Koinonia** – fellowship. The notion of community therefore is based on the notion of people coming together for the common good or for a common goal.

During this pandemic and during our VE Day celebrations at the beginning of this month we've heard a lot about community. In any crisis, be it war or plague, people's natural instinct is to draw closer to each other. Ironically in this Coronavirus pandemic we're instructed to keep our physical distance from others to ensure their safety – unless you're Dominic Cummings that is!! But 'social distancing' is still about community because we're looking out for others in order to keep people safe. And we only have to look at the community efforts in all our villages, neighbours shopping for each other, checking in on those who are most vulnerable and isolated that we see real love and service in action.

Community is constituted when people join together in common endeavor and with common values, sharing with each other and seeking the common good. How then does our notion of community apply to the Feast of Pentecost?

In last week's Gospel we heard Jesus praying the Father's protection on those *whom [the Father] gave me from the world*. [Jn 17:6] in order that they may be protected by the Father *so that they may be one as we are one* [Jn 17:11]. This 'oneness', this inclusion of these disciples in the intimate relationship between Father and Son, constitutes close *koinonia* – communion – between God and humankind. It's a community bound together through prayer – the prayer of Father and Son which reaches out to embrace people and draw them into the life of the Godhead. Jesus also promises the gift of the *Spirit of Truth... who abides with you and he will be in you*. [Jn 15:17] The Father showed his love for us by sending Jesus his Son into the world in order to draw us into that *koinonia* which is the life of God the Holy Trinity. His Ascension enabled the coming of God's Holy Spirit as St John says, to dwell within us. This enables us to live as part of God's community, sharing His love and His peace in the way that Jesus modelled and taught throughout His earthly life.

When Jesus appeared to the frightened disciples following his Resurrection he constituted them as a community by breathing the breath of the Spirit into them. And the values of that shared life are peace and forgiveness. Neither of these are easy for us. Jesus spoke of the peace that the world cannot give. And he's right. Peace isn't simply about getting away from all the busyness of life, withdrawing from everyone and sitting in a darkened room! Peace is about making those choices in our interconnected lives that lead to a sense - again using the Greek word *koinonia* – of communion, of harmony, of oneness of loving purpose – which is at the core of God's own being. And to have this kind of deep peace we need to forgive and accept

forgiveness. When we think about how we forge community liturgically, the Eucharist points us towards that perfect community – the heavenly community – which we DO share in through being constituted as Christ's body in our Eucharistic celebration. We are gathered as a community of faith through the presence of the Holy Spirit, constituting us as the Body of Christ. The gifting of the Spirit at Pentecost was necessary to forge Christians together, united by Baptism into our common faith. Christian community is forged in the Spirit and requires the ongoing presence of the Holy Spirit who enables and empowers us to communicate God's merciful love in the communities where we live and work. St Paul reminds us:

For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body – Jews or Greeks, slaves or free – and we were all made to drink of the same Spirit.

[1Cor12:12-12]

The end of Acts 2 shows us what the post Pentecost Christian community was like. They praised God, were thankful and shared with those in need. Most importantly *they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.* [Acts 2:42] This was the gift of koinonia – of communion – of Christian community gifted by the Spirit at Pentecost. This is how the Spirit continues to work, in and among us as Christians today. This is the joy of Pentecost.