

***Spirit of the Living God, in this season of Pentecost, fall afresh on us. Spirit of the Living God, open our eyes, and our ears, and our hearts, to what You would have us see, and hear, and do. Amen.***

A little while ago my friend Rev Spanky Moore asked a group of young Anglicans three questions to see if he could reveal the state of health of the church. We are a little older than Spanky's audience; and I wonder what our answers might reveal in this context. These questions aren't meant to embarrass us, or provoke us into any particular course of action ... but what if they did?? Could we cope? His questions were as follows:

**Question 1:** What would you say *The Good News* is?

**Question 2:** How are you *Good News* to other people?

**Question 3:** Have you experienced *The Good News* as being good news in your life?

Having differences in the way different groups in our church express or conduct ourselves in worship is normal but obedience to whatever rules we have doesn't on its own indicate the state of health of our church. To me our connectedness with the Holy Spirit is a better indicator. How do we assess that? We pray and we seek answers to prayer, and we follow our *passion* ... you know *joy, or indignance* ... and we assess our determination to act on those passions.

Our Romans reading today talks about *hope*; "hope that is not seen." Paul encourages the church in Rome to lift their sights; to hope for something beyond their current grasp and *hope* equates to *passion*. He declares that the Holy Spirit "helps us in our weakness" ... is it weakness to not know for certain, or is it weakness to not care? Paul tells us that

the Spirit knows the mind of God and our task is therefore to align ourselves with the Holy Spirit and with *The Good News* of Jesus Christ; this is the key indicator of our state of health in the church and this is the key difference between us and our non-Christian friends.

Our readings this morning describe the background to, and events surrounding Jesus' disciples receiving the Holy Spirit. Before this, the disciples had submitted themselves to Jesus' teaching, perhaps with a view to doing His work in due course. After this, they each became a *new creation*, as a direct consequence of their receipt of the Holy Spirit! They were no longer fishermen, or tax collectors ... *they were evangelists!* They were empowered to bless, to baptise, and to heal, to forgive the sins of others. In other words, they were to proclaim The Good News of Jesus Christ.

There are differences between John's gospel and Acts chapter 2 regarding the timing and manner of the disciples' receipt of the Holy Spirit, but both accounts agree that this event provoked a change of direction in their lives.

Luke says that *suddenly* "on the day of Pentecost" (during the Jewish Festival of Weeks, 50 days after the Passover, when they gave thanks for the gift of the Law that made them different from other nations living around them) ... "there was a sound from heaven like the roaring of a mighty windstorm, and it filled the house where they were sitting ... what looked like flames or tongues of fire ... settled on each of them ... everyone was filled with the Holy Spirit and began speaking in other languages." The disciples and 3,000

of their friends, received a new gift that *replaced the Law* as the primary means of their salvation ... and *this new gift* was available to *everyone!*

I love the contrasting imagery. Remember the Tower of Babel where God made the builders all speak different languages so that their efforts were frustrated, and the Tower could not be built? Here the opposite occurs for precisely the opposite reason; the disciples needed to be able reach out to not Jews but Gentiles, and make The Good News available to them ... so the Holy Spirit instantaneously enables them to communicate with various other cultures in ways that they will understand!

We Anglicans don't often get passionate about sharing The Good News with others, instead we "seek justice in the world." Some of us though, only get as far as praying for it (or *even merely hoping* for it) ... remotely from over here, while the problem is over there. But the discomfort we feel often comes from an *ethical conviction*, rather than from a spiritual indignance ... a direct threat to our sense of *righteousness*; where's the passion in that? How does that differ from that which our non-Christian friends feel?

Is there a difference between the "do no harm" of secular justice, and the fact that our Father in heaven requires us to "love our neighbour?" Surely, *loving our neighbour* demands a higher standard of compassion, empathy, and equity, than merely "doing no harm?"

Spanky's survey *on its own* doesn't lead to any particularly finding about the state of health in our church or any other for that matter, but it might provoke each of us to discover something about which *we can become passionate* and make a difference for Jesus! *Now that* might indicate the true state of health of our church.

In that context, have another think about Spanky's questions:

**Question 1:** What would you say *The Good News* is?

**Question 2:** How are you *Good News* to other people?

**Question 3:** Have you experienced *The Good News* as being good news in your life?

***Come Holy Spirit, inspire our souls. Reveal to us what it is You would have us do. Empower us now, for Your work in the world. Amen.***