

Homily for Whit Sunday

Today we celebrate the birthday of the church and we remind ourselves how the Spirit of God came upon the disciples. It's good to remember how that same Spirit is with us now today.

My theme today is "Wind, Flame and Power!" that's because although no one knows what God's Holy Spirit looks like, in the Pentecost story the Spirit appears as wind and fire.

A story!

A number of years ago Jean and I were on holiday in Portugal. We were staying in Vilamoura on the Algarve and were sitting on our balcony watching a flotilla of little yachts sail out of the marina.

It looked as though there were some instructors sailing with quite a long line of youngsters all in their own little boats.

At the back of the line came the dingy with an outboard motor - the safety boat - just in case!

It all looked very well organised.

We sat and watched.

The little boats were very slow leaving the safety of the marina but once out into the sea they seemed to come to life. The wind caught the sails and they were off!

They bobbed up and down moved quickly over the sea. However, on that day the wind seemed to be very unpredictable. All was quiet for a while and then the little sails billowed out and off they went at a fast pace then suddenly the wind would drop, the sails would relax, and they would come to a stop.

As we watched all of a sudden a big gust of wind blew so strong it turned some of the little boats over.

The safety boat was soon alongside picking them all up and getting them started again.

Until the wind blew there was no power and the little boats were going nowhere then when the wind blew, the sails were filled and the little boats were on their way.

But if the sails were not in the right place, or the youngster sailing the boat was not ready then the power of the wind went to waste and sometimes the youngsters ended up in the water. The point is they had to be ready!

The Holy Spirit is often compared to a rushing wind and just like the boats without its power we can do nothing.

Like the little boats it seems the spirit can only help us if we are ready to receive it.

I believe we have to recognise God's Spirit and then use it.

Have you noticed how many wind farms are springing up all over the countryside.

The wind has been blowing over those same hills for thousands of years.

It was only when man came along and used the power of the wind for grinding flour or for driving machinery, or pumping water that the power was harnessed and put to use and it's only in recent times that the huge propellers have appeared to generate electrical energy.

That's another example of recognising power and then using it. For us recognising God's Spirit and getting on board!

In the Bible the wind is one of the ways the Holy Spirit is described.

Luke writes in Acts:-

"Suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting."

Jesus said:-

"The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit."

The Holy Spirit is also symbolised in tongues of fire. My Pentecost stole has tongues of fire embroidered on the front. A reminder of the power of God's Spirit.

The Spirit of God is also symbolised by a peaceful dove. Remember when Jesus was baptised.

What amazing differences there are in just those three symbols:- Wind Fire and a peaceful dove.

I guess they are all attempts to describe something that is really indescribable.

Something beyond language!

They are attempts to explain in symbols what we can never hope to explain.

We can feel the wind and fire and see the dove and we can see them all in action.

It seems to me that using symbols like wind, fire and the dove will mean different things to each one of us and I think that's good!

After all there is not just one interpretation of something that is beyond our explanation.

I guess these pictures help us to use our imagination. They prompt us to think and ask the question -What does this mean to me?

The image of a mighty wind shows us that the Holy Spirit brings power and we can feel that power in the wind! That is provided we're ready to receive it! If we are not we may well end up in the water!

I believe we need to remember that without God's Spirit we can do nothing! We are powerless!

I wonder how often do you feel powerless -

powerless to do something you want to do or something you feel you ought to do?

An evangelist described that as being "a dollar short or a day too late!"

I like that. I know what he meant!

That feeling of falling short of what we should be.

But there is help at hand and it's the best help available to anyone.

It's the help that comes from God through his Spirit.

Without that help it's impossible to show any of the fruits of the Spirit.

Love

Joy

Peace

Patience

Gentleness and so on.

So if you feel your little ship has become becalmed. What should you do?

That's easy!!

Pray, pray, pray, pray, pray and pray again!

However, you have to remember to be ready to catch the wind when it begins to blow.

The youngsters in the little boats have to be ready to catch the wind when it begins to blow.

Or they end up in the sea.

So for us it is truly pray and be ready.

What, you might ask, do you pray?

That's easy too!!!

"Come Holy Spirit!"

That's all that's required!

Mean it and be ready!

It's interesting that the word the Bible uses for Spirit is the same word it uses for both wind and breath.

That same word Spirit also gives us words like inspiration.

So perhaps the Holy Spirit is like God's breath, breathing on us and inspiring us with new energy and strength

One of my favourite hymns is:-

"Breathe on me breath of God

fill me with life anew"

We can prayerfully ask for God to breathe on us and fill us with his Holy Spirit.

But remember it's not just a once in a lifetime prayer we need it daily or by the hour.

May we know God's powerful Holy Spirit moving among and between us all, now and always.

Amen

Revd Stephen

Pentecost 20

For fifty days we have celebrated the victory of our Lord Jesus Christ over the powers of sin and death. We have proclaimed God's mighty acts and we have prayed that the power that was at work when God raised Jesus from the dead might be at work in us.

As part of God's Church here in Rastrick, I call upon you to live out what you proclaim.

Empowered by the Holy Spirit, Will you dare to walk into God's future, trusting in him to be your guide?

By the Spirit's power, we will.

Will you dare to embrace each other and grow together in love?

We will.

Will you dare to share your riches in common and minister to each other in need?

We will.

Will you pray for each other until your hearts beat with the longings of God?

We will.

Will you dare to carry the light of Christ into the world's dark places?

We will