

A source of comfort

8 6 14

God, who at this time
taught the hearts of your faithful people
by sending them the light of your Holy Spirit;
grant us by the same Spirit,
to have a right judgement in all things
and evermore to rejoice in his holy comfort.

This morning, our text, just two words from the start of Acts chapter 2:

'wind' and **'fire'**

Today is Whit Sunday, the Day of Pentecost, the birthday of the church, when the Holy Spirit came to the disciples who were praying in the Upper Room and filled them with the energy and the ability to go out into the crowded streets of Jerusalem and there to speak to the people, many of them foreign Jews, there for the pilgrim festival of Shavuot, speaking to them in languages each could understand. It was extraordinary, it was exciting, and it gave Peter the opportunity to tell his audience that what they were witnessing was a prophecy of Joel fulfilled, the last days when the Spirit of the Lord would be poured out on people enabling them to speak the word of God.

It is not easy to understand what the third person of the Trinity is like. At Jesus' baptism, we have the image of the Holy Spirit as a dove. Here, at Pentecost, we

have two images: one the sound of a strong wind blowing through the room; one of tongues of fire, alighting on the head of each of the disciples present. Fire and wind are two forms of energy and this morning, I'd like to touch on the idea of the Holy Spirit making us strong, fit for purpose, giving us the energy to do all that is needful.

To do so, I'd like to consider just one of the titles of the Holy Spirit which the King James Bible translates as '**Comforter**'. In John 14 verses 16 and 26, in John 15 v26 and in John 16 v7, the evangelist uses the word παρακλητος (parakletos) of him which in Greek literally means 'one called alongside'. Being alongside means being there with us, for us. It reminds me of the promise Jesus makes at the end of Matthew's gospel '**I am with you always**' (28 v20). It reminds me of the name of the virgin's son in Isaiah's prophecy quoted at the start of Matthew's gospel - '**Emmanuel - God with us**' (1 v23). To be there for us with us means that we are not alone, that we are not dependent simply on our own energy - that we can be plugged in, connected to a source of clean renewable energy that isn't subject to power cuts or power failures. And here, the Latin derivation of the word 'comfort' is key to what the word might mean. Comfort - con fortis - with strength, made strong, strengthened. That's what the Holy Spirit can do for us, being with us, alongside us: he can encourage, support and reinvigorate us.

And, oddly, that is one of the functions of the comfort we can offer our friends in their grief and distress. We all know what it means to lose someone we love. When we do, a period of mourning is essential to come to terms with the loss of the person dear to us. In this respect, those close to us, our friends and our

family, those we trust, can provide that vital source of encouragement, giving us the heart, the energy to come to terms with our loss and to get on with our life without the one we want to be with and long to hold again in our arms.

So if I were to sum up who and what the Holy Spirit is for us as Christians, I would simply say he is there for us, with us, inspiring and encouraging us. Personally, I like the word Comforter that the King James Bible uses to translate 'parakletos' because, for me, to be a comforter embodies the idea of gifting energy that is a striking feature of the account we've just heard in Acts of the coming of the Holy Spirit. I love the idea of being connected, in touch with God the Father through the Incarnation of his Son our Saviour and by the thought that his Holy Spirit is with us, alongside us, comforting us and making us strong.

So were you to ask me if I am in good heart, the answer should come as no surprise and the reason why I leave you to guess

I have spoken in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,
Amen.

Preached at the Eucharist

St Bartholomew's, Dinard

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