

The Parishes of Tavistock, Gulworthy and Brent Tor

The Parish Office, 5a Plymouth Road, Tavistock, Devon PL19 8AU
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Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

I hope everyone is keeping safe and well. Thank you for everything you are doing during lockdown, the church is lively and active in so many ways, despite immense challenges.

You may have seen in the news and on C of E websites, that tentative plans are being discussed nationally to re-open our buildings in accordance with Government guidelines (yet to be published). Whilst this is good news, as yet, no specific date has been set for this, and much preparatory (and on-going) work will be required to achieve this, and to maintain everyone's safety when it happens. I will keep you fully informed and I look forward to resuming our activities in our churches as soon as it is safe and possible to do so. For everyone's wellbeing, we are asked to proceed cautiously and in accordance with national guidelines.

Today is the Day of Pentecost. Pentecost is often described as the birthday of the church and that's always sounded rather sentimental to me, because it's not a sentimental story. It's a dangerous one. The story opens with that small group of believers isolating themselves: "they were all together in one place". Perhaps they were afraid of outsiders so they all stayed together. Hindsight can sometimes be a wonderful thing. Had the disciples known better they would have been afraid of not dispersing because of what was about to happen. Yes, they were in danger, but not from outsiders. As they sat all together in one place the danger they were in was from God. God will suddenly speak with tongues of fire and with the sound of a violent and rushing wind: Divided tongues fire, will appear among them and rest on each of them. All of them would be filled with the Holy Spirit and begin to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gives them ability.

Fire, wind, voices and languages: All this happened on the day of Pentecost day, and it's all seems very strange. In some ways, first century Palestine now seems to resemble what the Church has become today – people "locked in the house", and isolating, but not for fear of the Jews, but because of fear of Coronavirus.

Today, because of the pandemic, we live with anxieties and isolation due to the lack of safe spaces to be. As we reflect again of the circumstances of the first disciples, perhaps we can see something of ourselves? At the very beginning, and today, there we all are. Possibly anxious and possibly confused. And these are the very people to whom God sends the Spirit.

The good news for us today is that God hasn't changed. Those who are anxious or confused, are the very people to whom God sends the Spirit. People of different colour, races, nations languages, and situations. And just like that first Pentecost, God still breaks into the world. The time of living in fear and isolation will pass. These things will come to and end. We need have no fear. This is what is so amazing about the way in which God works. This shouldn't surprise us.

The Holy Spirit, often symbolized as a Dove, and often called the comforter, brings a kind of comfort we might not expect. The Spirit brings the comfort of the truth - the truth that can set us free from fear and isolation - and that isn't sentimental - it's powerful, and dynamic, and life changing. Strengthened by the Spirit, our faith, and our commitment to one another, remains strong. We pray and worship together, we serve others in the best ways we can - we look forward to the reopening of our buildings and the easing of lockdown.

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We are an expectant people, and I think it's important for each of us to foster that sense of expectation in these difficult times. And that means being attentive to our hopes and aspirations as we seek to discern our gifts and to use them wisely in these challenging and changing times. It means holding on to, and sharing the vision of what is possible together - being realistic and hopeful, courageous and faithful.

It's worth remembering that of the gifts of the Spirit, four of them: wisdom, understanding, counsel and knowledge are directed to our minds and our ability to think. It's a constant temptation to blunt the cutting edge of our faith by substituting the ordinary for the sharp, the conventional for the fresh. God hasn't changed. The Spirit brings the comfort of the truth - it's powerful, dynamic, and life changing.

Through the Spirit, God speaks to us and asks at least two questions. Firstly: "Do you believe this today?" Do you believe that in Christ, you will find all that is necessary and sufficient for the life of faith - for the life of the church in our communities, and for your life in the world in the 21st century? Do you believe that if you turn to Christ honestly, trustfully and expectantly, and above all prayerfully, your needs will be supplied - that the Father will give you whatever you ask in his Son's name? And Secondly: As a disciple of Christ and rooted in prayer: "What are you capable of being and becoming?" St. Paul says that the gifts of the Spirit given to each of us at Pentecost differ according to the grace given to us. If our gift is prophecy, let us prophesy; if serving, let us serve; if teaching, let us teach; if encouraging, let us encourage; if leading, let us lead thoughtfully; if showing compassion and empathy, let us do so cheerfully (Romans 12.6-8). The list, of course, is almost endless. The Day of Pentecost reminds us that we all have our own gifts, each of which is infinitely precious.

We stand united with Christians the world over - strengthened and encouraged in the life of faith, in worship and prayer, and in our ministry as disciples wherever we may be. With Christ at the centre of all that we do, God has blessed us, and we are called to be a blessing to others.

I will continue to keep in touch by telephone, email/letter, and upload worship, prayers and reflections on our website, on Facebook, and on YouTube. If you would like to join me for our weekly ZOOM coffee morning (Wednesday at 10.30 am) please email me at veryrevdchristopher.hardwick@btinternet.com and I will send you the link on the day.

Please be assured of my continued love and prayers.

Christopher Hardwick
Vicar

Pentecost 2020