

Pentecost 2017

For the last 9 days a small number of us have met to pray through the Novena, the sacred period of nine days between Ascension and Pentecost, a time between Jesus leaving us here on earth and the Holy Spirit being sent to us.

Of course, Jesus was only human; he had a limited time on earth, and once his work was done then it was time for God to act in a different way.

God is many things, but one thing he is not is predictable. He continues to surprise us as he gracefully works in our lives to enrich us and humanity.

And prayer is a way to take time to listen to what God is saying to us and planning for us. In the busyness of our lives, even for those who are retired, busyness can take over from the stillness we need to hear God.

I want to look back over the last 2 weeks to remind you of the Gospel message that Jesus gave as he prepared to leave.

Two weeks ago I told you of the fear that people held for the new invention of the railway built by Isambard Kingdom Brunel. People were fearful of change, of the unknown. Yet from that sprung huge innovation and progress. The dawn of the railway carved out, quite literally, a new means of communication. And I reminded you that the light shining through the newly created Box tunnel was a sign that would and did bring light not destruction.

In his farewell discourse Jesus told the disciples that very soon a new Advocate, the Spirit, would be given to them; that he would not leave them alone and without guidance; that the trinitarian God remained in them. And our other readings that Sunday spoke of the gifts we receive from God and the love we share with him and one another. Jesus was preparing the disciples for change and reassuring them that all would be well. Fear, he told them, would imprison them but hope in the promise that Jesus is coming again would hold them together in an effective and strong community.

And last week we had the prayer of Jesus to his Father, speaking in depth about his relationship with the Father and the Father's relationship with humanity. In everything – in his life, and his message, and his legacy – Jesus had glorified God and renewed the covenant with his people, that perfect relationship of love. And then, as they say, the work really began. My sermon spoke of bereavement and loss, the shock and physical pain of grief; all part of the human story. As Jesus spoke of leaving his disciples he gave them a mission to continue his ministry and share his

wide vision for the whole world. He gave no detailed instructions; he had taught them all he could, and the Spirit would guide them.

Today we celebrate Pentecost, Whitsun, that wonderful time when we mark the Holy Spirit coming into our lives to remind us constantly of the unpredictability of God.

One thing we do know is that God speaks to each one of us in the language we understand – witness the reading from Acts. Our duty is not to screen him out and ignore what he says.

Ours is a God of relationship – a relationship of Father, Son and Holy Spirit, a relationship of mutual and mutually expressed love, a relationship that holds no barriers of colour, race, creed or tongue; a relationship which we celebrate especially next week at Torbryan on Trinity Sunday. And that relationship is there for the taking – that's all we have to do.

Our faith reminds us that the inclusive new Christianity grew from the exclusive old Judaism; here the Holy Spirit speaks in the native language of each, fulfilling the prophecy of Joel, “I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh”, promising that “everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved”.

St. Paul teaches us that the Spirit works in everyone in different ways, suiting the gifts of individuals for the common good, because we are stronger in diversity, unified in our faith.

And in our Gospel, Jesus tells everyone who would listen that ours is a faith for everyone.

As I said last week, “Transformed by the resurrection life, we live outwardly for Christ, shining with love for his world.”

Under God, with the guidance of the Spirit, all will be well.

AMEN.