

## Reflection for Pentecost by Megan Cambridge

Pentecost is the Greek name for the Jewish Feast of Weeks or Shavuot which occurs 50 days after Passover. It is one of God's feast days; one of 3 Pilgrimage feasts (Exodus 23, 24 Leviticus 16, Numbers 28 Deuteronomy 16). It was the celebration of the early weeks of the wheat harvest when the Jews celebrated 'first fruits' of the grain and oil of the land – the things that give abundant life. The Festival of Weeks also celebrated God giving the 10 commandments 50 days after the exodus. The reason that there were people from all languages in Jerusalem that day to hear Peter's message was precisely because they were there to celebrate the Old Testament Pentecost.

Historically our Christian church is considered to begin in the collective outburst of Pentecostal enthusiasm as told in today's reading from the Acts of the Apostles. The disciples in the reading on whom the mandate was first imposed with the gift of the Holy Spirit also represent all Christians in all generations sent, as Christ was sent, into the world on a mission.

So Pentecost is the day we commemorate the spectacular birth of the church, the day when we remember the countless ways in which the Holy Spirit, the Advocate, the Counsellor, the Comforter, shapes the church as an institution and ourselves as individuals. It is when we are reminded that, having received the Holy Spirit, we have a mission to complete. On Pentecost the Holy Spirit comes as God dwelling in the human heart, living with us, our connection to life that does not end. The gift of the Holy Spirit is foretold in Joel 2:28-29 and promised by Jesus (John 14:26).

We use the word 'spirit' in many ways, don't we? We talk about human spirit and national spirit and we hear a lot about community spirit just now. We talk about being in good spirits or our spirits being low. Our secular world likes to talk about 'spirit'. It is recognition that we are more than skin and bone that there is more going on inside us than just biology. There is an instinct that there is something much more mysterious going on. The Holy Spirit is the mysterious sense that inspires us, encourages us, comforts us and strengthens us.

The gift of the Holy Spirit is continually poured out on all believers but at baptism and confirmation, we are anointed and sealed with the Spirit through the laying on of hands and the Chrism oil. St Irenaeus (2<sup>nd</sup> century teacher) likened the Holy Spirit to oil. He says as oil is poured into a vessel so the Holy Spirit is being poured into us, into the church. He says 'it is the most remarkable and wonderful elixir that transforms the vessel that holds it;' it gives life, renews and enlivens and 'makes the church young again'.

The Holy Spirit is present and available and powerful and at work now as much as in the beginning; the provider of new energy, new inspirations, new growth, new life. How appropriate is that given the new ways we have had to 'do and be' church in these pandemic times?