

## **Reflection for Pentecost** by Megan Cambridge (Lay Reader)

Wind and Spirit—things we know a lot about in the North East of Scotland. Today's readings teem with wind and spirit but of a different kind. Today we are given an abundance of powerful readings that speak of life, hope, new beginnings and future. A common thread through all today's readings is the Spirit inspiring renewal and rebirth. The Spirit gives birth to the Church (Acts 2). It is the Spirit's breath which constantly gives new life to the earth (Psalm 104); and leads us into truth with new revelations for a new generation (John 16). The Spirit brings hope to a troubled world.

In our Old Testament reading we have the stark image of the valley of dry bones. This might well be the valley of COVID-19. The wind of change that blew over our country, the world, in the early part of last year literally took people's breath away. For those who have lost family, for those in the NHS working on intensive care wards, for carers in care homes it must have felt like the valley of dry bones. However, for all its apparent dryness and desolation the valley is actually a story of hope. It's a story of promise. It's a story about a people who have a future. "You shall live" is the theme that runs through the valley of dry bones.

"Mortal, can these bones live?" the Lord asks Ezekiel. Ezekiel responds but he doesn't answer the question. He just says, "O Lord God, you know." Well, that's honest of him. We can hear his uncertainty, sense his feeling of powerlessness looking at the overwhelming enormity of it all. God only knows if these bones can live again. It has felt like that hearing the news and listening to the numbers of cases, deaths, job losses, and financial hardships. We can all feel a bit like Ezekiel. It's easy to focus on and despair over the number of dry bones but that is not the final story of God and God's people. Ten times God promises life and wholeness, return and homecoming. Ten times God promises that the dry bones of this valley are not our final reality. Throughout God says, "and you shall live."

Our Psalm also speaks of the re-creating power of the Spirit in creation "when you send forth your spirit, they are created; and you renew the face of the ground." Psalm 104 is traditionally read at Pentecost because of its reference to the life-giving spirit.

In the reading from Acts we come to the central theme of today, Pentecost, one of the Church's great festival days. When I was growing up in the Church of England it was referred to as Whit Sunday – a historic reference probably to the white clothes worn by people being baptised on this day. Created anew, with new life, hope and future in God.

In the reading we are reminded that the disciples had recently been experiencing their own 'lockdown'. They were also expectant as they had been told by Jesus, prior to His Ascension, to wait in Jerusalem, "and you will be baptised by the Holy Spirit within a few days" (Acts 1 v.5). Luke describes the deafening sound and spectacular sight as each was filled with the Holy Spirit. His focus is the impact of the Spirit on people: how they went outside and began evangelising to a gathering and increasingly astonished crowd.

We have become familiar in the telling of this story with Peter's powerful speech but think about it for a moment. Seven weeks ago, this man, now a fearless preacher, had skulked away, having denied Jesus three times. He was the one who leapt out of the boat and started walking across the water to Jesus, then whose courage failed (Matthew 14:29-30) What had changed? Well, the Spirit had emboldened him to fulfil the potential which Jesus had always recognised in him. Something for us to reflect on and to pray for, to let the Spirit embolden us today to fulfil the potential to which we are called both as individuals and as a Church.

The Holy Spirit we encounter in the passage from John's Gospel is very different from the one associated with tongues of fire and rushing winds described in Acts 2. In this case we have gone back in time to Jesus preparing the disciples for his imminent departure from their lives. He will send the Spirit to them.

Peter's text from the prophet Joel, reminds us the Spirit stirs us – young and old – to have dreams and visions. We're not talking about day-dreaming or random flights of fancy about what it would be nice to do or to have. Rather we need bold dreams like that articulated by Martin Luther King in August 1963. If ever there was a time when we need to have a vision about how things might and should be, post-pandemic, surely it is now. We can think about those whose dreams and aspirations have been put on hold or knocked off course by what has happened; and how the pandemic has revealed so starkly the plight of the poor and vulnerable who don't even dare to dream. Renewed and inspired by the Spirit of Pentecost, how can our Church not only respond to what will happen post-Covid, but also help shape it?

Pentecost ushers in a new beginning, a new day, a new creation, a new life. Pentecost celebrates the coming of the Holy Spirit no longer limited to particular people or events. Today it is made available to all. No one is left out.