

Pentecost – what are we waiting for ?

What jobs require a certain amount of physical courage ? Stunt man.

- a blacksmith. Some horses do not take too kindly to someone hammering nails into their hooves, and a horse's back leg is not something you want to get into conflict with. But from the trade of the blacksmith comes the phrase: 'to strike while the iron is hot'. There is a moment when the iron is exactly the right temperature to be shaped and if you strike even 30 seconds too late, it's much harder to do.
- He's in a good mood at the moment and delighted with what you've achieved this week. Ask him for a pay rise now ! Strike while the iron is hot.

And if ever there was a time to strike while the iron was hot, it was just after Jesus had left this world. The disciples had seen him several times since the resurrection. All lingering doubts were totally gone. Their faith was probably as high as it had ever been. He'd expressed extraordinary confidence in this little band of followers: saying "Go and make disciples of all nations". They returned to Jerusalem with great joy, with all these wonderful events still fresh in their minds. With all these events fresh in their minds. Perfect time to start work straight away, I'd have thought: Strike while the iron is hot.

And yet Jesus had said: No. Go back and wait. Not wait and make detailed plans. Just do nothing at all, and just wait. Until the Holy Spirit comes. He didn't even say what that was going to be like.

Now, what exactly were they waiting for ? They weren't like someone waiting for a new boss, a new leader. What's this new boss, new headteacher, new landlord at the pub going to be like ? No, Jesus had breathed on them: 'receive the Holy Spirit'. In other words, the Holy Spirit is my life within you. We sometimes unconsciously see the Holy Spirit as a good stand-in: a bit like a supply teacher, or a bank nurse. Qualified, but not the same as the real thing. But the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Jesus himself.

Jesus breathing on his followers: but that breathing was just a foretaste of the howling gale of Pentecost. That howling gale was Jesus saying to them: okay, I said I'd be back. Now I really am. My Spirit, my breath is here and here to stay.

But can we look at one more thing: what did they need this Spirit of Jesus for ?

2 things: First of all, becoming more Jesus-like in character: I was trying to find a good analogy for this. To be honest, the simplest analogy is how to make a decent cup of tea. You pour boiling water on the tealeaves, and let the flavour spread. The tea leaves are in the water. And the longer they're there, the stronger the tea gets. The more the spirit of Jesus is in someone, the more his character, his love, his peace, his unselfishness infuses that person.

But there's one other thing. His parting words were 'you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes and you will be my witnesses'. And at Pentecost, the first thing they did was standing up and telling folk what was going on and who this Jesus person really was. Later on, they really got round to helping the poor and making a difference to that society. But it started with telling others, and that is something they continued to do.

Now we self-respecting Anglicans sometimes get a little uncomfortable with all this. I mean, people are entitled to their own beliefs, we say - which is true. And let's face it, some Christians who talk about faith can be seriously off-putting – that's true too.

But let's pause and think again of Jesus' words to them: you will be my witnesses. I don't know if you've ever been a witness in court. The closest I ever got was simply leaving my name and address with the victim of someone else's reckless driving. I got phoned up by the insurance people and made a statement over the phone. But all I did is say what I saw. I didn't know the exact speed the idiot driver was going, I couldn't remember if he indicated or not, I didn't know whether the driver had been drinking too much. I just saw this car suddenly try to turn off and go directly in front of an oncoming car that really had no time to brake. That's all I saw. So I gave a simple witness statement. When the holy spirit comes, you will be my witnesses. We don't need to be experts in theology. It might be really simple:

"Sometimes when I pray about something, I feel much less anxious about it afterwards"

"I've noticed that person's become a lot kinder since he came to faith"

"Or I went to a church service yesterday and really felt better afterwards."

I was chatting with a Vietnamese friend who said: "I used to be really arrogant, had lost my job and broken up with my boyfriend. My only friend kept inviting me to her church, so I went just to shut her up, and she was the only friend I had left. And after several weeks, I suddenly realised those people in church were the only people in my whole life I'd ever been able to be myself with. Then I started to want this Christian faith for myself".

She simply said what she saw. That's all a witness is. What have you seen? It really may not seem like much to you, but I suspect it's a lot more valuable than you think. People who try to convert others every time they meet them tend to be very irritating. People who are just occasionally quite happy to say what they've experienced or noticed can make a surprising difference. "when the Holy Spirit comes" Jesus said "you will be my witnesses". His call is still there.

