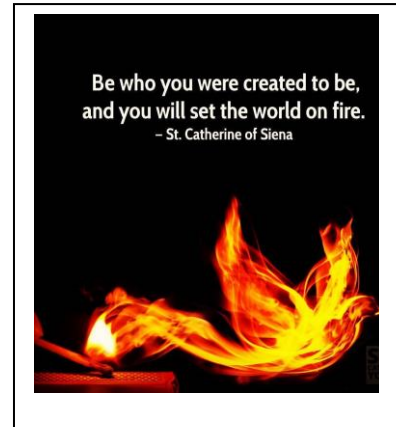


## PENTECOST SUNDAY

28<sup>th</sup> May 2023.

Acts chapter 2 is about the public beginning of the Church. In a sense, though, the church had begun weeks earlier when Jesus told the Apostles:



*<sup>19</sup> Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, <sup>20</sup> and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. (Matthew 28:19-20).*

Those words can be considered, in modern terms, the commissioning of the disciples for the task that God, through Jesus, had selected for them. They would be the ones who began to build the Church into what it has become.

Jesus had already commissioned Peter, as we read in Matthew 16:19 –

*<sup>19</sup> I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.”*

Peter's leadership began quickly as he arranged for the election from among the disciples someone replace Judas Iscariot as one of the apostles. The one voted for was Matthias. This was a democratic vote, and it was the first business meeting of the

church. In Acts 1, verse 15, it is recorded that there were about 120 people at that meeting.

Recently, chapter 8 of the Old Testament book of Zechariah was brought to my attention. Zechariah is essentially two books. The first seven chapters speak of the unwillingness of the people of Judah and Israel to listen to God and follow what was given to Moses at Mount Sinai. To put it simply they chose to follow idols. As Psalm 135:15–18 states:

<sup>15</sup> The idols of the nations are silver and gold, made by human hands.

<sup>16</sup> They have mouths, but cannot speak, eyes, but cannot see.

<sup>17</sup> They have ears, but cannot hear, nor is there breath in their mouths.

<sup>18</sup> Those who make them will be like them, and so will all who trust in them.

Those words are not a description of God.

Chapters 8 to 14 tell of the restoration of the exiles to the Holy Land however it is chapter 8 that is important for today. This chapter records God's promise to bless Jerusalem. The important verse for today is verse 23:

<sup>23</sup> *This is what the Lord Almighty says: "In those days ten people from all languages and nations will take firm hold of one Jew by the hem of his robe and say, 'Let us go with you, because we have heard that God is with you.' "*

In one of my studies of the Bible my lecturer commented about the number of people who may have been at the Last Supper and who are referred to at the election of Mattias – about 120 people. He was referring to the Zechariah statement. There were twelve apostles, each of whom may have had ten people listening to them, taking hold of the hem of their garments – an allusion to closeness. After all Jesus did send 70 or 72 people out to spread the Word.

One disciple, Judas Iscariot, proved unfaithful. If the Zechariah promise from God did eventuate, perhaps those ten who may have been close to Judas, also dropped away. The uncertainty of the numbers at the election of Mattias could be explained by the absence of those who may have chosen, as the Zechariah quote states, to “*take firm hold of one Jew by the hem of his robe,*” and had chosen Judas.

Let us consider the first verse of Acts 2: *When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place.*

We are not told where that place was. It may have been where the Last Supper took place. It has also been suggested that it was at the home of John Mark who would write the Gospel of Mark – and that place could have been where the Last Supper was held. If so, and all the disciples, numbered at 120, were also present, it puts a different light on Jesus’s washing of the feet.

Let us now consider the size of the room where the followers of Christ were meeting on the day of Pentecost.

It would be more than twelve people. It was probably close to 120 people, which would have meant much noise when all began to speak at once.

I live in a retirement village with a community hall. It is probably about 15% larger than the hall here. When functions are held it can be very noisy and that is with people speaking one language. It is difficult to quiet them if an announcement needs to be made. So, imagine 120 people gathered in the hall here. There may have been gabble or perhaps Peter was speaking.

Suddenly, there is *“a sound like the blowing of a violent wind”* coming *“from heaven.”*

We have all seen the devastation from violent winds like cyclones, hurricanes, and tornados. This violent wind was inside a building.

Then came *“tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them.”* But no one was burned.

The initial response must have been fear, followed quickly by shock as a babble of voices came with all speaking different tongues, a gift given by the Holy Spirit who had appeared in the form of wind and fire.

In reading this my mind goes back millennia before to the Tower of Babel where humankind decided to build a tower that would reach heaven and God confused those arrogant people by taking away their common tongue and separating them by language barriers. For the people in that room suddenly those language barriers were gone.

Way back in my teens, I studied French for five years at high school. In my last year I failed miserably. As I recall the last mark that I got at the end of the year was 29 out of 100. In fact, I totally failed my Leaving Certificate that year.

To suddenly be fluent in another language must have been stunning to those people in that room. It was dramatic and that was necessary. It illustrated the power of God. It was not the first appearance of the Holy Spirit however it was the first outpouring of the Holy Spirit for such a large number of people were given that touch of the Holy Spirit at one time.

Verse 5 of the text advises that *“there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven.”* For Luke and his contemporaries, their view of the world was limited and was centred around the Mediterranean Sea and, due to Alexander the Great, the lands eastward to India were known, at least to the educated. The Americas, North and South, and east Asia, Australia, and the Pacific were not known. So, every nation under heaven were those around the known world.

The nations are listed in Acts 2: 9–11 –

*<sup>9</sup> Parthians, Medes and Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia,<sup>10</sup> Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene; visitors from Rome <sup>11</sup> (both Jews and converts to Judaism); Cretans and Arabs.”*

Not recorded in Luke’s account was why there were so many people in Jerusalem.

It was the time for the Jewish Festival of Weeks, known as the Shavuot. This is celebrated seven weeks and one day after the Feast of Unleavened Bread – the Passover which, of course, was when Jesus was crucified. Jewish rabbinic teaching says that the day also marks the revelation of the Torah to Moses and the Israelites at Mt Sinai. That is, the first five books of the Hebrew Bible, namely the books of Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy.

So, it was for that reason, so many people were in Jerusalem. Not a coincidence but part of God's plan for His word, spoken through the voice of Jesus, His Son, to be spread across the world. Many of these people would have been part of the Jewish diaspora, the spread of the Jews across the ancient world from the time of Nebuchadnezzar, some of whom did not return. There would be a second Jewish diaspora a few decades after this when Rome destroyed Jerusalem in AD70.

As we read the text, it is seen that these people were amazed at what they were hearing, and some considered these speakers to be drunk. At that point Peter stood up with the Eleven, the other Apostles, and began to speak.

For the moment, let us pause and consider Peter. The Gospels tell us that Peter could be rash, irritable and capable of anger. He was unlearned, that is he was not trained in the Mosaic Law. He was a fisherman. Peter was, however, the first of the disciples to acknowledge Jesus as the Messiah. For that reason, Jesus chose him to be the leader of the early church. Yet, Peter would disown Jesus three times on the night that He was arrested and, as we read in John 21:15 – 19:

*<sup>15</sup> When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?" "Yes, Lord," he said, "you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Feed my lambs." <sup>16</sup> Again Jesus said, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" He answered, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Take care of my sheep." <sup>17</sup> The third time he said to him, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, "Do you love me?" He said, "Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Feed my sheep. <sup>18</sup> Very truly I tell you, when you were younger you dressed yourself and went where you wanted; but when you are old you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go." <sup>19</sup> Jesus said this to indicate the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God. Then he said to him, "Follow me!"*

Jesus spoke these words to Peter on the beach of Lake Galilee after His resurrection. Peter had shown his leadership at the time Mattias was elected as one of the Twelve. Now, in total difference to his acts of denial on that night when he publically betrayed Jesus three times, Peter stands up to make the first public preaching about Him.

First, denying that the men and women now infused with the Holy Spirit were drunk, as some of the witnesses were saying, Peter went on quoting the prophet Joel who had prophesied around 800 years earlier:

*<sup>28</sup> "And afterward, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream*

*dreams, your young men will see visions.<sup>29</sup> Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days.<sup>30</sup> I will show wonders in the heavens and on the earth, blood and fire and billows of smoke.<sup>31</sup> The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD.<sup>32</sup> And everyone who calls on the name of the LORD will be saved; for on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there will be deliverance, as the LORD has said, even among the survivors whom the LORD calls.*

Peter then continues to speak about Jesus. His words resonated with the crowd, and he was asked “What shall we do?” To which Peter responded, “Repent and be baptised,” echoing the words of John the Baptist. As we learn from Acts 2:38–39 about 3,000 were baptized that day. In quoting Joel, Peter refers to the Last Judgment which will come in God’s time. When that time will be is unknown, but we are living in the last days. It matters not that it is 2,000 years since Jesus died and was resurrected. The last days could come at any time.

Let me bring this back to us. Each of us in this room, and those watching online, is here for a reason. We may have heard God’s call to us. We may still be seeking God. He may not call us in a dramatic way. It may not be by tongues of fire and the sound of a violent wind. He may not call us from a burning bush. It may be like He did with Elijah in a small, soft whisper. It may be as simple as a word in one’s mind. That was my experience.



It was in February 1995, on a Sunday morning. I was passing from my kitchen to my lounge room when the word church came into my mind. Pondering over this, as I sipped my coffee, I realised that I had been called. That night I went. That night I began a journey that I would never have envisaged for it led to my being here today, preaching. Twenty-eight years ago, I would have scoffed.

God also speaks to us without words but by opening and closing doors. We may be heading, we think, in a certain direction but, suddenly, we are diverted. We may feel disappointed, or even angry, but God has his plans for us as is written in Jeremiah 29:11 – *“For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the LORD, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.*

Peter may have thought that he would be fishing on Lake Galilee until he died. Instead, he ended up a leader of the early Christian Church, crucified up-side-down, it is said as he felt he was not worthy to die as Jesus, his Savior did. Among God’s plans for us, is our salvation through Jesus, His Son, if we seek repentance and give our hearts to Him.

As Luke wrote in Acts, about 3,000 people were baptised on that long ago Pentecost day. To put that in perspective: that is about 35% of the people who live in Chelsea, according to the last census.

Pentecost is a celebration of the time when Christ's promise that He would baptise his followers with the Holy Spirit. This was told by John in his gospel, Chapter 14: 15 –

*<sup>15</sup> "If you love me, keep my commands. <sup>16</sup> And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever— <sup>17</sup> the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept Him because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you."*

The advocate is the Holy Spirit who lives within us when we accept Jesus into our lives. The word for advocate can also be translated as "Comforter," "Encourager," or "Counsellor." The Holy Spirit is the very power of God within us working for and with us.

The Holy Spirit is within you and me. We are not alone.

I will end with a prayer. *Almighty God, at the feast of Pentecost you sent your Holy Spirit to the disciples filling them with joy and boldness to preach the gospel: fill us with that same Spirit to witness to your redeeming love and draw all people to you, through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.*