

Introduction

A few days stand out in history as days that changed the world.

Most of us will recall where we were on Tuesday 11 September, 2001, when four flights were hijacked and two planes crashed into the World Trade Centre in NYC, one into the Pentagon, and one crashing into a field in Pennsylvania. That day 2,996 people died.

Or you might remember July 20, 1969 as a day that changed the world when the first man stepped onto the moon. (unless you believe the conspiracy theories, that it happened in a back lot of universal studios.)

Or if you are old enough, 8th May 1945, the date of the end of world war II in Europe, and the return of hope for a grief-stricken world.

Many of you will have your own significant dates. Your wedding day. The day of the birth of your first child, or maybe even the second or third. Or sad days, like the date of the death of a loved one.

These personal moments change us, and are the high points or sometimes the low points of our journey through life.

And some of those public events change the course of history. I once went on a walking tour in NY and the guide just referred to Sept 11, as “that day”, so much had it shaped the psyche of the city and more broadly the USA and the rest of the world. I was reminded of that last year when I inadvertently left a small bottle of water in my carry-on bag for an international flight!

The Bible has a couple of big days. Days that changed the world. Days that shape identity. We celebrated one – 50 days ago. The day of resurrection, when death was defeated, sin atoned for, and Jesus proclaimed Lord of all. And today we celebrate another of those big days, that change the world: the Coming of the Spirit on the Church on the day of Pentecost.

Of course, before it was a day of Christian significance, it was a day of Jewish significance. A celebration of the giving of the law at Mt Sinai, and especially a harvest festival. 50 days after Passover. A week of weeks – that is 7 weeks, (plus one day – for the Mathematicians) and was sometimes known as the Feast of Weeks for this reason.

This was why so MANY people were in Jerusalem that particular weekend. The streets would be clogged with people celebrating and rejoicing in the gracious provision of God in the harvest.

Now if you have been around in church for a few Pentecosts you might be familiar with the story.

The Event – Acts 2:1-4

When the day came, (Luke tells us), the disciples were gathered together in one place. And Luke tell us that three things happened that Pentecost day.

First a mighty sound. Please notice that it wasn't a wind, but a sound that sounded like the wind.

Second - they were visited by a miraculous sign – tongues like fire that divided & came to rest on ea. person there. Again, it was not fire but something like fire.

Third there is the amazing phenomenon of people being able to speak in other languages or dialects, as the Holy Spirit of God comes upon them and gives them ability.

Three seemingly “natural” signs - wind fire and word, but of supernatural origin and quality. It was an astonishing and miraculous event.

For some with eyes to see, and a keen eye for biblical history there were some clues about their meaning.

Wind is sometimes equated with life and often with the Spirit of God as we see in Ezekiel 37, which speaks of the wind and the spirit and the breath.

Fire is often a sign of the presence of God. Fire and smoke were present when the law was given on Mt Sinai. Remember this is the Feast of Weeks! But it was also in Exodus 13 that God led them by a pillar of cloud and fire.

And Intelligible words, were lost at the Tower of Babel in Genesis 11, where different languages threw people into confusion and they were unable to communicate with each other. And what transpires here may be an indication of the reversal of that curse.

Whatever the significance God was moving in an extraordinary way. The Spirit, the presence of God and the ability to communicate.

And this is picked up by the:

Effect on the Crowd Acts 2: 5-12

Because the world had come to Jerusalem for the Feast of Weeks, there were people with a lot of language backgrounds in Jerusalem.

And the list here sounds a bit like a United Nations Delegation

Verse 5 says:

Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven.

And then we get the detail:

When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard their own language being spoken. ⁷ Utterly amazed,^a they asked: “Aren’t all these who are speaking Galileans?”^b ⁸ Then how is it that each of us hears them in our native language? ⁹ Parthians, Medes and Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia,^a Pontus^b and Asia,^{a c} ¹⁰ Phrygia^a and Pamphylia,^b Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene;^c visitors from Rome ¹¹ (both Jews and converts to Judaism); Cretans and Arabs—we hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!” ¹² Amazed and perplexed, they asked one another, “What does this mean?”

“We hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues”

“what does this mean”?

I heard a story recently of a man in one of our churches who met a girl who had suffered from a bad back for years. The man felt prompted by the Spirit of God, within his own spirit, to ask if he could pray with her.

As he prayed asking God to heal her, she started to exclaim as her back became warm and then hot, and the pain she had carried for years started to abate, and she straightened up and the pain was gone.

You can imagine HER saying too: “what just happened?” “what does this mean?”.

A few months ago now I went down the Southern Beaches Anglican, our new church plant for a service of baptism and confirmation. There I met Tim and Katie. Their lives had hit some serious hurdles – depression suicidal plans, a termination, anxiety substance abuse. They landed in Tasmania, far from their supports and one day found themselves at Southern Beaches Anglican. Through a couple of false starts they encountered God’s unconditional love and deeply attractive grace in Jesus, and their lives have been turned around. It was great to see them baptised and confirmed.

They were still saying:
“what just happened?” – What does this mean?
just like the day of Pentecost.

Now if you’d been following the story you might have an indication of the answer. Back in Acts 1 just before his ascension into heaven, Jesus had said to the disciples: *In not many days from now, you will be baptised with the Holy Spirit.* In Acts 1:8 he explains further. ⁸ But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria,^c and to the ends of the earth.”

THIS was THAT! God had turned up in a way he had never turned up before. THIS was a turning point moment. But it was unsettling and so it is little wonder the crowd said: “What does this mean?”

Interpretation

And as is always the case the Scriptures give the interpretation of our experience.

Peter stood up and addressed the crowd. And in explaining what they had just witnessed he told them what was written in the book of Joel in the OT.

Let me read to you again from verse 17.

¹⁷ ‘In the last days it will be, God declares,
that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh,
and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,
and your young men shall see visions,
and your old men shall dream dreams.

¹⁸ Even upon my slaves, both men and women,
in those days I will pour out my Spirit;
and they shall prophesy.

Verse 21

²¹ Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.’

You see this momentous day that changed the world; was the day that God had promised from old, not just in Joel, but in Isaiah and Ezekiel as well. That a day was coming when the Spirit of God was not just poured on an individual for a particular task, as it had been on the Kings and Prophets for their tasks, but as Joel says: it will be poured on “All people” on sons and daughters, young men and old men, “all my servants” both men and women.

The Spirit had come!
and this Spirit was now available to every person. People's hearts would be changed.

In John's gospel we read that God would make his home in each one of us. and live in us by his Spirit. And the day of Pentecost was the day this took place.

Two implications

1. Jesus has gone, but God is still with us

It was just 10 days ago, that we celebrated the Feast of Ascension. The earthly Lord Jesus, concluding his earthly ministry, his incarnation, and returning to reign in heaven. As one wit put it last week, "going to work from home!".

It is a wonderful and powerful reminder that he reigns.

But there is something slightly worrying about the Feast of Ascension. This Jesus who was born "Emmanuel", was God with us. He was God enfleshed and dwelling among us.

And his ascension into heaven was the moment he was no longer with us. And there is a moment there when I'm sure the disciples felt very unsure. He's gone away. He is no longer Emmanuel with us anymore.

But the wonder of Pentecost is that God the HS has come to us, and made his home in each of us individually, and in the church, and dwells among, in, and through us.

Jesus is Gone that is true, but God is STILL with us. He is tabernacling not in the body of his son but in the temple of the holy Spirit, his body the church, and in each person who knows God through Jesus.

Jesus is gone but God is still with us because of this day that changed the world.

The second implication is that:

2. The Spirit leads our mission

I want you to notice that when the disciples were filled with the Holy Spirit, they spoke the words of God in the languages of the people, so that many heard the salvation of God in Christ. The people said: "we hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues".

I want you to notice in Joel, in Peter's sermon, that the coming of the Spirit on all flesh, is so that "the people will prophesy" (verse 18). That is – tell God's word to the world. So that (verse 21) "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved" (v 21)

The outpouring of the Spirit for prophecy is so that people will be saved.

And, we haven't read it this morning, but the result Peter's sermon was that the people asked, "what shall we do?", and 3000 people accepted the message and were baptised on the spot!

The point is that the Holy Spirit poured out on the first church, at the first Pentecost, led and empowered their mission. And he continues to lead and empower ours.

In every parish and ministry of the Diocese, we are on mission. Moving out from here to our broken and needy world, in the power of the same Spirit, to declare the wonders of God, so that everyone who calls on the name of the Lord Jesus will be Saved.

And it is because we have the spirit that we can be bold and confident trusting that God's presence goes with us in the calling to mission in our lives.

Today we celebrate A Day that Changed the world - the coming of the Spirit of God poured out on all his people. To assure us that God is with us every day, and to propel our mission, so that every tribe and language and people might know the salvation and mercy of God.