

What images spring to mind when you hear the word Pentecost?
(responses)

Well when you search for images on Google you'll be surprised at the range and variety of what turns up – perhaps the most unusual one that caught my eye was **this one** attempting to connect the idea of flames with the dove, but the next one, on a similar **theme** not only picks up the clear image



of a dove but has a much greater sense of power.



But let's follow the text and see what emerges

“They were all together in one place” (2.1)

Well, we have to go back a chapter to find out how many might be included in the “All”.

It turns out that Luke tells us in an aside, in verse 15,

that “together they numbered about **120 people**” – and at that point they were engaged in the task of replacing Judas . . . and as in the KJV “the lot fell on Matthias.”



So where was the “One place”? Very unlikely to be in a private home no matter how large the ‘upper room’, and we could easily be misled by the word ‘house’ appearing in the text when the sound of the wind came.

You see the Greek word used by Luke is ‘Oikos’ – and while he often uses the word to refer to an ordinary residence he also on occasion uses the same word for the Temple - the ‘House of God’

For example, in Luke 6-4 Jesus recounts how David and his men entered the house of God and ate the bread of the Presence reserved only for the priests”; and then in Holy week when Jesus clears the temple of the traders and money changers he thunders “It is written My house shall be a house of prayer but you have made it a den of thieves” - that’s Luke 19.46

Again in Acts 7.47 during Stephen’s speech before the Sanhedrin, he remarks that “it was Solomon who built a house for him (God)”

In each instance Luke uses the same word ‘Oikos’ so there is every reason to believe the place where they were gathered was in some antechamber or court of the temple.

“And suddenly from heaven came the sound like the rush of a violent wind” - Now the Hebrew ‘ruach’ means “wind,” “breath,” or “spirit.”

The first use of the word in the Bible appears in the very second verse:

“The Spirit of God [Ruach Elohim] was hovering over the waters” and in Genesis 6:17 ruach is translated “breath of life.” Genesis 8:1 uses ruach to describe the “wind” God sent over the earth to recede the



Flood waters. Altogether, the word ‘ruach’ is found almost 400 times in the Old Testament. And Pneuma is the Greek translation.

So, how appropriate that a noise from heaven heralded the outpouring of the Holy Spirit?

And who, in Eastbourne, has not heard the sound like a rush of a violent Southerly clamouring at the widows and shaking the house?

We know what that’s about! – but it’s outside; and the walls and doors of the temple, like those of our homes, would have protected the peace and tranquillity of that inner room where there appeared what looked like tongues of fire which settled on everyone there – Just as John the Baptist had promised, when asked if he was the Messiah. “Oh no” he said “one who is more powerful than I, is coming; . . . He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.”

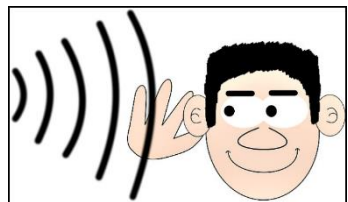
You may recall that before his ascension Jesus had instructed his disciples to wait in Jerusalem for the promise of the Father. He said “John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.” And Peter recounted to the Church council in Jerusalem when explaining why he had baptized the Gentile Cornelius, when Cornelius and his family had obviously received the gift of the Holy Spirit. He said he remembered these words of Jesus and “If God gave them the same gift that he gave us when we believed . . . who was I that I could hinder God?”

But back to the text. It says in the NRSV that “all of them of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages as the Spirit gave them the ability”

Now again there is a chance for confusion due to the Greek word translated as “languages” That Greek word is ‘Glossa’ which literally means ‘Tongue’ or ‘Tongues’ as you will find in the old KJV.

I believe the confusion has arisen because of what all those gathered in Jerusalem heard – these Galileans telling the Good news of God in the hearer’s own language. It’s the same Greek word ‘Glossa’ that is used, and the technical term for speaking in tongues is ‘Glossolalia’

I believe the emphasis should be on what was **heard** rather than what was spoken. It’s also clear from other parts of the New Testament such as Paul’s instructions to the little church in Corinth, as well as from the experience of those in the Charismatic renewal, that hearing a word from God in the inner ear is a gift of the Spirit, not unlike what we experience when we practice Lectio Divina – listening to the words read, in order to hear what is being said to us. Let me share a personal experience to give some insight as to why I think this may be the case.



When the Charismatic renewal came to NZ in the early ‘70s I had just begun my ministry in Gisborne and a visiting Pentecostal preacher

came to town. He joined me in a session after my evening service to explain what was happening, for those who may be interested. Most of the congregation stayed. At one point after talking about the gift of prophesy he said “I think someone here has a word from God” A woman I knew well began hesitatingly to speak. She stopped and the preacher said, “I think there’s more,” and another member of our congregation spoke the rest. They told me later that both had heard a voice in their minds speak the full message, but the first had felt embarrassed and stopped part way, leaving it to the other to finish speaking what they both heard. The rest of us didn’t hear anything.

However, whatever the truth of the matter, that incredibly diverse gathering of Jews heard the Good News in their own tongue, and they were incredibly puzzled. Some however, didn’t hear, . . . and thought the disciples were drunk.

Now the reason for there being such a crowd was that they had come to Jerusalem for the Jewish Feasts of Weeks –

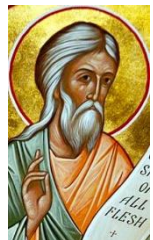
‘**Shavuot**’ in Hebrew, at which seven weeks after Passover, the first fruits of the harvest were brought to the temple, not just to honour God as the source of sustenance, but almost more importantly, to recall the giving of the Law on Mt Sinai, 7 weeks after the escape from Egypt.



So you might say that as well as being his witnesses, the disciples were the first fruits of what was to be a great and on-going harvest, and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, the fulfilment of God’s promise through the prophet Jeremiah to make a new covenant written not on stone but in the hearts of God’s people.

However, it was not Jeremiah that came to Peter’s mind when he rose to explain what was happening, but the prophet **Joel**.

“These are not drunk” he said “it’s only nine o’clock in the morning.



No this is what was spoken by God through the prophet Joel -

‘I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophecy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men dream dreams’”

But of course the Day of Pentecost, and the experience of the Spirit throughout the church from that day to this is so much more than a rather puzzling event with Old Testament overtones. It has ever been the way in which the living Christ becomes present to us in our own experience, reminding us of his words and challenging us to follow in his footsteps.

It’s far more important that you are out there in the world, as Tom Wright has said, “letting (the breath of the Spirit) **sweep through** your life, your heart, your imagination, your powers of speech, and transform you into someone whose heart is on fire with the love of God.”

I wouldn’t be waiting for the noise of a rushing wind or looking for my own little flame, though for many then, and now, glossolalia was seen, or rather heard, as the sign of someone having received the in-dwelling of the Holy Spirit.

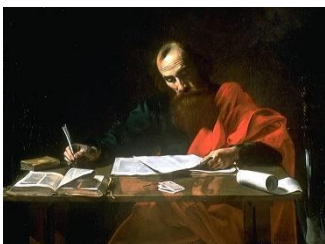
That’s what convinced Peter to baptize Cornelius, and later, why Peter and John were sent to Samaria to lay hands on the many folk who had responded to Philip’s ministry, “for as yet the Spirit had not come upon any of them.”

And even later when Paul discovers a group of disciples in Ephesus who only knew of John’s baptism and hadn’t even heard of the Holy Spirit.

And it is **Paul**, in his letters to the young churches, particular those to the churches in Corinth, and Ephesus, who makes abundantly clear that the gifts of the Spirit are many and manifold, . . . and although a

tongue-speaker himself, warns of the danger of elevating that, or any gift above another – all are given and exercised for the building up of the Body of Christ for the work of Christian ministry – he even mentions a gift of administration!

The work of the Spirit is not always



exhilarating and flamboyant, but as a careful reading of the book of Acts makes clear, the Spirit more often works softly and quietly, transforming lives and situation when God's people have an **ear to listen**, to that inner prompting, such that led Ananias to go and to meet Paul, or Philip making contact with the Ethiopian, wondering about the scriptures he was reading on the way home.



And it's important to remember that the first step is seldom about speaking the Good News first, but rather listening for a point of contact in order to meet the current needs of the person to whom you are listening – very often,

just a **comforting presence** is more important than spoken words. And most of you know that I walk in St Francis' 'little way' of following Jesus. It was St Francis who said "Preach the Gospel at all times and if necessary, use words" . . . sage words. To be an effective witness is not necessarily a noisy or wordy thing,



But we are encouraged to listen for the Good News for us, to listen for the prompting of the Spirit, and to listen for the needs of the one we are prompted to help. That's how the Spirit of Pentecost will live in our midst.

