

Pentecost

Readings: Numbers 11:24-30; Acts 2:1-21; John 20:19-23

Today we find the disciples in lock down. Like us they are locked down because they are fearful. Like us they have been in lock down for 50 days. And, like us, they are waiting for someone to release them. In their case it is Jesus they wait for. In our case it is Dr Ashley Bloomfield.

Probably they are in the same room where they celebrated the first Eucharist with Jesus. But no mere locked doors can stop Jesus keeping his promise. “I will not leave you desolate but I will come to you,” he had said to them, and he does come. He greets them: “Peace be with you”. At the Eucharist, his parting gift had been peace, and now he offers it again, “Do not let your hearts be troubled or afraid,” he had said to them. He shows them his hands and his side, so they know it's really him. He followed the giving of his gift of peace with his mission charge, “Peace be with you. As the Father sent me so I send you.” And he breathed the Spirit on them.

Getting a mission or commission is all very well but they needed the power to act and the authority to speak on his behalf. It is in the breathing, the gifting of the Spirit that the disciples receive the power both to speak and to act.

It's like when God breathed life into the first person in Genesis, it's like when God breathed on the valley of dry bones in Ezekiel. In the Narnia chronicles C.S. Lewis has Aslan, the great lion, breathing upon the children of Narnia whenever they need the strength for the tasks he has given. In the same way Jesus breathes on his disciples, “Receive the Holy Spirit.”

It used to be called the ‘Breath of Life’ . My friend Phil is a trained lifeguard. Once, when he was in buying a fridge, he looked through to the office behind the counter and saw a man slumping over his desk. He ran through to

discover that the man was not breathing. So, Phil laid him out on the ground and gave him the 'Breath of Life'. The ambulance came and took him away and the ambulance officers assured Phil that he had saved the man's life. Phil went back to buying the fridge. "I saved your boss's life. Could you give me 10% off?" "Sorry," said the sales woman "We didn't like him that much."

There can be little doubt of the change the Spirit brings on the disciples. They move out from their lock down and go out into the world. They are given the ability to speak to all people and they begin to be the church with good news for all the world. A liberating good news that sets all people free. The Greek word used for forgiving in the Gospel is the same word that is used of Lazarus when he comes out of the tomb. It means to unbind.

When Rosemary and I were young co-vicars in Burwood, I went one day to the primary school office to place an ad in the newsletter. It was to advertise a forthcoming event in the life of the parish. I can't remember what. Without my clerical collar the office administrator had no idea who I was. I knew who she was, and she had a reputation of being difficult. She looked at the ad. She looked at me. "You can't put an ad for the church in the school newsletter," she said, "unless you have permission from the church." What came next surprised me as much as her. From somewhere deep inside me I found myself saying "I am the church." Without another word she placed the ad.

The first frightened followers of Jesus are about to discover that they too are the church. And I hope by the time I have finished talking that you will discover that you too are the church.

One of the great gifts of the Spirit is that it sets all people free to be church. If you like big words, it is democratizing. The Spirit is totally radical in its inclusion of all people. "In those days," God declares in our Acts reading, "I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh, your sons and daughters shall prophesy, your young men see visions, your old men dream dreams, even upon the slaves both men and woman I will pour out my Spirit." This is radical stuff: the old divisions

of slaves and free, men and women, young and old are gone, all are to be church, all have equal access to the Spirit. No wonder being a Christian was so popular in the ancient world.

The Old Testament reading also echoes this theme.

Moses is on a path to burn out. He can't do it all so the Spirit leads him to gather seventy others who can shoulder the load with him. Some of his Spirit goes and rests on them.

Some churches are rugby match churches. A rugby match has been described as 28 people desperately in need of a rest being watched by 10,000 people desperately in need of some exercise. This parish is not like that. Over lock down, I have felt held by all your prayers, by the ministry of a wonderful vestry who have met over Zoom. The wardens have been excellent, and the health and safety committee has been busy like you wouldn't imagine. Ethan has stepped up wonderfully to provide us with webcasts and the Care Bears have been brilliant.

As each of us comes out of lock down we discover that Jesus' gift of the Spirit is not just for a bunch of people long ago, it is for you and it is for me. Jesus gives us peace, and he sends us. It matters little if we are young, old, male, female, rich or poor. The Spirit is poured out on all flesh.

On this Pentecost my prayer for you is simple: I pray that you might have the grace to say, "I am the church."