

SERMON – PENTECOST SUNDAY 24TH MAY 2026 (KH)

John 7: 37-39 and Acts 2: 1-21

Good morning!

And as we do at experience Easter, let's dial back 2000 years. So I invite you, if you're willing, to close your eyes for a moment or two, until I say to open them, and we'll see what we find...

My name is Caleb and I came with my friends Reuben and Ezra from our village to Jerusalem in time for Pentecost – fifty days on from Passover – when we faithful Jews celebrate the giving of the Torah (our Law) to Moses on Mount Sinai. And when we bring the first fruits of the harvest to the Temple to offer to God. There are many of us this year from many different places – Reuben, Ezra and I are from Parthia, and have been together to Jerusalem a few times for this celebration.

But this year has been different. Very different!

We all assembled early today and were milling around when, only a few minutes ago, there was a huge noise and commotion. We all came together in a crowd to go to where the noise was coming from, and it turned out to be from a house close by in a back street. And suddenly a group of men came

out of their house and were sort of on fire with excitement and life. That was strange enough, but then they started talking to us all in the crowd.

We all thought ‘how’s this going to work?’ because we are from many different places – all Jews but speaking a bunch of different languages. As I mentioned, we are Parthians, but there are Medians, Elamites, people from Mesopotamia, Judaea, Cappadocia, Pontus and even Asia. There are people here from Rome, even, and from Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt; parts of Libya near Cyrene; Cretans and Arabs. We all speak different languages – it’s been really interesting to meet many different people over the years and realise that while we are all Jews and worship the same, one God, we are all so different.

Anyway – there was a murmur that this group of twelve men were from Galilee and were followers of Jesus – although we live a long way away, we had heard of Jesus and that he had been crucified by the Romans. We hadn’t heard much more than that, but here were his twelve closest friends suddenly talking to us.

Not only that, **they were speaking our language**. We could understand them. Unbelievably, all of us could understand what they were saying even

though we were from such different parts and such far-away places. They spoke of the great things that God has done. **And we could understand.**

One of the wags in the crowd, I think he was from Crete, shouted out 'These people must be drunk!'. We all laughed - It was so confusing. We were trying to work it all out.

But then one of the group of twelve, a burly, fisherman type, stood up and spoke loudly to the whole crowd. He said he and his friends were not drunk – it was still only nine o'clock in the morning. And although it seemed like a long day already, this man was right about the time. And he quoted scripture from the prophet Joel. I couldn't hear it all, but I caught some of what he said:

He talked of God pouring out his spirit, and of visions and dreams. Of miracles in the sky and wonders on the earth. Of there being blood, fire and thick smoke and the moon turning blood red. All this before the great and glorious day of the Lord comes, he said.

Everyone hushed then and I heard him say clearly and slowly:

'And everyone who calls on the Lord will be saved'.

So, let's fast forward 2000 years and reflect on what we have heard today. Extraordinary, world changing events and God sending his Holy Spirit with noise like a strong wind and tongues of fire. No still small voice, as it was when God spoke to Elijah. **That's God's choice**; this time, at Pentecost it's dramatic and life-changing for the twelve Apostles and for the world from that day onwards. **God sent his Holy Spirit to dwell among us for ever.**

Jesus had promised his disciples that this would happen, as Luke reported in Acts chapter 1 verses 4 and 5: 'Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me have speak about. For John baptised with water, but in a few days you will be baptised with the Holy Spirit'. The few days have passed, and Jesus's promise has been fulfilled.

And, filled with the Holy Spirit, the Apostles started building God's church and God's church spread across the world. **Not without challenge; not without persecution; not without an enemy.** But with God's Holy Spirit, and with God's Holy Spirit living in and with ever more people. The Holy Spirit will dwell with and in anyone who calls on the name of Jesus.

Transforming Bromley Borough is a gathering of Christians of all denominations and churchmanship and there is a monthly gathering for an hour for prayer. And the Holy Spirit is present. It's not quiet prayer, but it's urgent and it's needed. This month's gathering was last Thursday.

This time, maybe because praying long and loud isn't necessarily inclusive, there were ten minutes to spend with our neighbours, where we were sitting. I joined a lovely, quiet Godly couple, whose home church was hosting, and we prayed together. It was a reminder to me that the Holy Spirit is with us in the noise and is with us in the quiet moments.

And the Holy Spirit is with us in the really tough times; He's there to soak up our pain, He's there to hear our cries; He's also there to share our laughter and our joy. He's there to carry us when we need to be carried. The Holy Spirit is simply with us.

Our reading from John's Gospel Chapter 7 reports that Jesus talked loudly to a large gathering about the Holy Spirit. Jesus said: **'Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them'**. John comments: 'By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to

receive. For the Apostles it was on the Feast of Pentecost. For us it's whenever we choose to invite the Holy Spirit into our lives.

I am a slow learner. Not in all things, perhaps – some things I pick up quickly – but some, really important things, it has taken me a lifetime to start to understand. This year, I have felt much more in tune with the journey through Holy Week to the depths of Good Friday, the joy of Easter, the resurrection of our Lord Jesus fully as a human to appear to and sit with and eat with his friends, his ascension to be with his Father, and the fulfilment of his promise to send God's Holy Spirit, our comforter, helper and advocate, wonderfully reported in John's Gospel chapter 14. Now today, on the Feast of Pentecost, we hear of the extraordinary fulfilment of that promise as the Holy Spirit descends with drama, noise, wind and fire to the gathered believers and witnessed by many.

It has been one of those wide-eyed journeys of discovery for me this year, maybe because I've been open more to listening rather than covering my ears to the Word. Maybe because I've preached a couple of times since Easter – preparing a sermon is the best way of having your eyes and ears

opened, so anyone reflecting on training, I encourage you to go for it – but this year it has got through my tin ears and closed eyes.

We are all different; joyfully diverse. We are all on our different journeys of relationship with the Lord; here at St. Paul's our role is to encourage those journeys and pray for them to be fruitful.

My concluding prayer, on this Pentecost Sunday, is that we will open our eyes and ears and hearts to invite God's Spirit into our lives. I pray that we may drink of the living waters Jesus talks of, that the Holy Spirit will fill us and dwell with us. That, as Psalm 23 says, even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for you are with me, your rod and your staff, they comfort me.

I pray this in Jesus' name.

Amen