

Ascension to Pentecost 11



“The Holy Spirit is that power which opens eyes that are closed, hearts that are unaware and minds that shrink from too much reality.”

John V Taylor

Prayer

Holy Spirit of God,
fill and enflame us,
then send us out
ablaze with your love.
Amen

‘Tongues, as of fire, appeared among them’ Acts 2.3

You may recognise the setting for this ‘Pentecost’: it is the Cathedral Church of the Holy Spirit, Guildford and, in 2007, this painting hung there during an exhibition by its artist, Kate Wilson.

Twelve figures are dotted about the nave. Wilson has brought Jesus’ first disciples to Surrey, catapulting them into our culture. They are no longer figures from a distant time and place but inhabit the world which is ours. And along with the disciples, she has brought the Holy Spirit. Literal tongues of fire rest on each head and huge flames leap in the vast spaces above.

Luke paints *his* picture of the Spirit’s arrival – the fiery tongues, the rushing wind, the strange new ability to be understood – in a mere 3 verses (Acts 2.2-4). Then he gives no less than 27 verses to Peter’s fiery, joyous speech to the multi-national festival crowds. As Jane Williams writes, “This makes clear what the gift of the Holy Spirit is for... not to fill us with religious feelings or give us unshakeable certainty or power, but primarily, to allow the disciples – and us – to do as Jesus said: to be his witnesses to the ends of the earth”.

What do we see as we gaze at the painting in the context of coronavirus?

We will probably see first that, uncannily, the figures seem to know about social distancing and also that they are inside a church – an experience denied most of us for months. But much more important is to acknowledge the weight Luke gives to witness and ask about *afterwards*. We know how transformational the Spirit’s arrival was to the disciples in Jerusalem but what about those in Guildford? What will they do when *they* leave the building?

And what about us? What will we do now that Pentecost is here? Are we open to being Spirit-led in our witness both during and after pandemic? How might the Spirit want to set us on fire? What winds of change must we embrace?