

Pentecost

Today on the Christian calendar the Church around the world will be remembering Pentecost. As you might have come to expect by now, as we consider the theme of Pentecost here, I'd have us consider it from a different angle. I'd like us to look at it from a different perspective, offering us another way of appreciating what is recorded.

First of all Pentecost is not about the Holy Spirit... "*Oh, here he goes... what's he going to come out with now... ?*" Pentecost is not about the Holy Spirit... Pentecost is about *the Spirit of Jesus*... and while some might say, 'it's the same thing... the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Jesus' let's remember the task of the Holy Spirit is not to glorify self, but to glorify the Son and to point to him. Pentecost takes on a new perspective immediately when we associate more closely the Holy Spirit, Holy Spirit's activity, and our Holy Spirit experience to Jesus, to his ministry and to his calling.

The Bible offers us great insights into how those from previous millennia, and living in the Middle East made sense of their world, and made sense of their world in faith terms. Everything for them was described and defined in faith terms. The origins of the planet they described in faith terms, life and death were given in faith terms, so too were illness and health, poverty and wealth, success and failure, victory and defeat, faith or disbelief, and so too the origin of divisions, disputes, borders and language. Whatever they wrote of they wrote of in faith terms, and by the way, for the western world much of science was written from a faith perspective until just over a hundred years ago

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The Tower of Babel event offers a theological account of how people came to speak in different languages, and how people came to be divided. Language divides us as you know if you have been abroad or if you are with those who do not speak your language... *I face it all the time...!!!*

On the Day of Pentecost the visitors in Jerusalem from various countries with numerous languages was able to hear the disciples speaking in their languages. Those who first read this were Jews and they understood immediately what Luke (the writer of Acts) was saying. They knew what point Luke was making. The Jews of 2000 years ago were very familiar with the

Tower of Babel story and would immediately have linked it with this. We might not because we are not Jews, and many will be utterly unaware of the Tower of Babel story.

Jesus broke down barriers that should not be broken down; he crossed borders that should not be crossed, and he spoke with those who should not be spoken to and he offered God to the most unlikely and undeserving. In the light of that, where else would the Spirit of Jesus lead the disciples?

Luke's story of Pentecost speaks to and tells of the first believer's experience of Jesus... how he affected them in life and how he continued to affect them after his death. Faith did not have to be lived out in fear... behind locked doors, but out where it was risky, even if it meant facing the angry crowd, even if it meant death. This is how much Jesus had impressed them and continued to impress them. His spirit, his word, his love, his fearless generosity of God was now in them: they shared fully in the spirit of Jesus.

Being faithful was not about being exclusive or tribal, for the love of Jesus knows no boundaries – and crashes through all such boundaries controversially and revolutionarily. Touched and affected by Jesus' radical love, the early followers felt compelled to share their experience of Jesus – they told of him, and they told how they entered into his way. Pentecost is less about the Holy Spirit and more about Jesus, and about the disciples entering into Jesus way of breaching borders and divisions and boundaries. This is Luke's way of telling of Jesus living on among them and with them.

These Jews who were writing the Bible always, and only ever wrote in terms of everything in relation to God. Luke's way of recording how they entered into Jesus spirit of breaching borders and divisions, cultures and language is awesome. Well of course it is. It had to be, it deserved to be, and it is how you write theology.

Last Sunday we had the first of our Family Services. The worship Team and I had organised and planned how to begin the service... but some things you can't plan for... as I entered the church and was walking up the aisle young Jensen (3 years old) caught sight of me. He began calling out "[Kenneth...](#)" then he decided to run round to see me. He leapt from a distance into my arms, wrapping his legs around my middle, and started giggling. He waved to his mum and to *Ashleigh* his sister and kept on giggling. What a way to start our first Family Service.

How I would report that gorgeous and glorious event theologically would be in ways like this: God made his presence felt immediately in the first of our Family Services;

God declared himself present in our Family Service;

God said to me... "Don't be nervous Kenneth I am present.

In that moment I saw God in our service.

"Did you really see God...Kenneth?" Yes!

"Did you actually see God...?" Yes!

"Literally?" – Ah!... 'literally' ... is the wrong question.

How would Luke write theologically of the disciples' Big Day, of leaving locked doors and entering into the world of Jesus ministry... of entering his spirit that breaches borders, divisions, cultures and languages? How would he write of the awesome event? And how could he write in terms that Jews would understand what he was saying?

The Tower of Babel, the Joel prophecy, the fire of Elijah, and from Exodus 14: 'Moses stretched out his hand over the sea; and the LORD swept the sea back by a strong east wind...' Luke employs everything – and rightly so, to tell of bold, fearless, all inclusive love of Jesus now being proclaimed through them.

This is what it is to share in Jesus' spirit; it is to do what he did; to speak his words, and to share his love across borders, barriers and languages. We are not to be the new exclusives, barrier builders, those who keep folk out... we are to be the new radical inclusives, those who outrageously include the likes of them. It's so much easier to have a Pentecost that is about tongues of fire, *that we understand literally*... because then we just keep to the status quo and even believe that we are empowered to preserve it and keep it the same!