

Hinde Street Methodist Church

Sunday 23 May 2021

11.00am the Revd Jack Noble, Marylebone Parish Church

1



Pentecost 2021, 'Pulpit swap' at Hinde Street Methodist Church

It is very good to be with you. Thank you for your welcome. I'm sorry we can't be 'all together in one place' (like the Apostles), but wherever you are this morning it is good to be 'with' you, and I bring love and prayers from your brothers and sisters at the top of the High Street at St Marylebone Parish Church. On this great feast of Pentecost we pray especially for the unity of the Church, for our common life, and for peace in the Holy Lands.

*Come Holy Ghost, Come down O Love divine and sanctify my words,
our thoughts, our hearts and lives
and make them an offering of Your love,
to the glory of the Father, with His coequal Son
and to thee, great Paraclete, while endless ages run. Amen.*

Alleluia! Christ is Risen! He is Risen indeed! Alleluia!

We need to squeeze all the alleluias we can out of these last few hours of Eastertide. When Evening Prayer has been said tonight these 50 days of Easter draw to a close and we begin the endless run of Trinity and Sundays after Trinity. So-called 'Ordinary Time' sees our churches and vestments go green and more or less stay that way (with a few golden spurts) until Advent. In truth of course there is nothing 'ordinary' about this time but we shall come back to that later.

In the Episcopal Church (our Anglican brothers and sisters in the USA) they do not call the season soon to be upon us Ordinary Time with x and y Sundays after Trinity, but (much better in my view) it is numbered as Sundays *after Pentecost*, as the Roman Catholic Church used to do too until the reforms of the 1960s.

Now, what on earth am I drivelling on about? You haven't come here for a dry lecture on the history of liturgical calendars – this is Hinde St Methodist Church on Sunday morning on the great and holy feast of Pentecost! Well, as if a lecture on liturgical calendars *could* ever be *dry*, and anything but spell-bindingly-fascinating-meets-sex, drugs and rock'n'roll?

But even with that important caveat in place, there is a point to all this.

In the Western Church of which we are all children we have been criminally negligent in acknowledging the Holy Spirit. At the end of the Apostles Creed we sling in a line 'we believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic church, the forgiveness of sins and the life everlasting' – zoom! – did you spot the Holy Spirit as it flew by in our rush to get to the end? We have endless prayers to God our Father, endless loving acknowledgement of Christ our Lord, but the Holy Spirit commonly only gets a mention in the doxology at the end, thrown in with the other two. It is a peculiarly western failing. Our Orthodox brothers and sisters have never been so silly. In their theology and worship God the Holy Spirit has always been front and centre, not relegated (as we so often do) to the asst manager, or God's PA.

This is especially foolish of us if we look at the facts. The most important of which is simply this: we are living in the age of the Spirit. We are now in the age of the Spirit as we await Christ's coming again.

And in the meantime, when we pray it is the Spirit praying in us. When we love, when we feel joy, when we feel empathy, or hope, or care – these are works of the Holy Spirit in us. The Church, her Sacraments, the scriptures, these are works of the Holy Spirit in us. Even our very existence moment by moment is a work of the Holy Spirit, who breathed the universe into being at the beginning and has been doing so ever since. From the tiniest cell in our bodies to the rock on the outer arm of the galaxy, all works of the Spirit. Christ no longer walks the shores of Galilee, but God is with us because His Spirit is with us. Here, now, ministering with patience and grace in my life and yours. This morning at St Marylebone at our early 8.30 service it is with complete confidence that we ask God's Holy Spirit to turn bread and wine into Jesus with us, just as Jesus promised. A promise, sealed in the Spirit. The Spirit is alive in the Church and in the world – when we leave these doors, or log off this zoom call it is the Spirit who will have fed us here and it is the Spirit who has gone before us to meet us in the world – to give us the gifts God has in store for us, to use us as vessels of the Spirit, to live out our calling placed on us by the Spirit in baptism as agents of God's love in the world.

So you see, there is nothing ordinary about this time. These are the days of the Spirit. Even the things we call ordinary, when we see them for what they are – we realise them to be works of the Spirit of God, and there's nothing ordinary about that. Because

even though God is faithful, and the promise sealed in the work of the Spirit is one on which we can rely, the Holy Spirit is no tame pet. Like Aslan, the Spirit is neither tame nor safe. The Holy Spirit is God.

So you seen what I was getting at? That ordinary time really is a misnomer, and that Pentecost really can't be overplayed because of what happened on *that* day to the Apostles and the Mother of the Lord and the others with them, and what's been happening ever since. So very soon we shall be 6 Sundays or 12 Sundays after Trinity. Better would be 7 Sundays or 13 after Pentecost. But even that would only be half the story. I rather think, if we count back, we'd find ourselves on the 103,376th Sunday after Pentecost.

We live in an age and part of the world in which institutions are unfashionable, and their shared belief smacks of control, or slavish 'organised religion' (what a very strange phrase that is). The Church has (often through our failings) become synonymous with exploitation of the weak by those clinging to power and intellectually indefensible nonsense. We either stick our heads in the sand, or chase after polite society's social and political mores, desperately hoping we'll be allowed to join their gang. What if instead we saw through all the ups and downs of the last 20 centuries of our family story, saw through all the debates that rage in the Church today, saw through all the power games and endless meetings about buildings and money and saw that actually, where we really are is the 103,377th Sunday after Pentecost. That's all we are and all God is asking us to be. We are the ones to whom the Apostles and the Blessed Virgin and the others brought the most important news that has ever been

carried, the most important story that has ever been told. We are the children of Pentecost, the family of the Apostles, the Church sent out to introduce people to the Living God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. A relationship that will change your life forever, literally.

Our calling, since Pentecost and given us at our Baptism, is to be the Church. Nothing less and nothing more. An old priest friend of mine is fond of saying: 'Jesus didn't come to found a religion, He already had one of those, He came to found a Church'. His Body in the world, sent out to invite the world to join in the greatest Love story ever told. You may already be on your way out the door, rolling up your sleeves to get cracking, or you may have sunk deep into your chair terrified at the prospect, but either way, the good news is, this calling isn't even down to us. When we pray, love, care, celebrate the Sacraments, feed on the words of Holy Scripture, share our faith, any and all of these things and more, it isn't us, but God's Holy Spirit in us that is doing these things. Not on our own strength or wit or holiness, we are simply joining in with what *God* is doing. The Spirit is here, alive and active, leading us forward into all truth and so that God may be glorified in us, just as Jesus says in today's Gospel, just as the Spirit did for the Apostles. There is nothing ordinary about the calling that has been placed on us, there is nothing ordinary about our lives. The Spirit of God is using them. You may be back at work, life, church – every moment is a moment of encountering the Spirit at work and calling us to be the Church. You may not have left your home for 15 months, you can be forgiven for thinking life has got ordinary, even dull, looking at the same four walls the whole time. But not so, a

hidden life of prayer for the Church and world is a extraordinarily powerful life in the Spirit, and a mighty work on behalf of all of us. Whatever, amongst whoever, wherever God puts you moment by moment in your life Sunday to Sunday, the Spirit is meeting you there, the Spirit has guided you there, the Spirit is at work there, we just need to open our eyes and join in.

One last piece of dry liturgical lecturing, because I know you love it really... Odo Casel, the 19th century German monk-scholar would have hated my counting 103,000 Sundays after Pentecost. He spent his life devoted to the study and understanding of the Church's Year – not one long strung out thing – but the cycle of the Church's life from Advent to Advent each year. And he was right of course, it is a wonderful thing to live the Church's year, the riches of feast and fast, to inhabit the story of our salvation year on year. Fr Odo said that the Church's Year (and this is vital for us as we celebrate Pentecost) is not an endless merry go round, just going round and round repetitively. Actually it is a screw (picture a screw) and with each turn of the year we go deeper and deeper into the mysteries we celebrate, and we get (with each turn of the year wholeheartedly lived, like a screwthread) we get deeper and deeper, and nearer and nearer to the point, which is the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ in glory. On Pentecost, as we celebrate what God has done, so we boldly join in with what He *is doing*, and hasten His coming again to bring in His Kingdom.
Come Holy Spirit, come down O love divine, draw near, your holy flame bestowing.