

Pentecost (Whitsunday) 2020

I want to begin this morning with a riddle:
When is white red, and red is white? ///

Answer: On Pentecost, also known as Whit or White Sunday.

But, why is it that on White Sunday we have red hangings and I wear a red stole?

Many of you will know the answer. But, for those who don't, here it is:

Pentecost was once – especially in northern Europe – a popular time for baptisms, and white garments were worn to symbolise the cleansing that comes through this Sacrament of the Gospel. Thus, the name, Whit-Sunday

Meanwhile, the red we see on the Altar and in other places reminds us of the fire of God's presence that came down at Pentecost.

Well, now that you know the answer to this riddle, let's move on.

Several decades ago, before this church was built . . . when this congregation was meeting in the Blue Ridge City Hall . . . we had an old wheezy reed organ.

When you turned on the vacuum cleaner blower that powered it, there came the sound of a rushing, mighty wind. And, it did indeed fill the room where we were meeting.

One Sunday -- it could well have been Pentecost, I can't now remember for sure – two ladies, daughters of a couple in the church, were visiting.

Following the service, I overheard one say to the other: When that organ was turned on, I wanted to stand up and shout, *Eureka!*

Eureka, you see, was a make of vacuum cleaners, and this word was frequently employed in this manner in the company's television commercials.

If you think about it, 'Eureka' is not a bad word to describe what happened on that first Christian Pentecost. It comes from the Greek and means, "I've found it!"

Just prior to His ascension, you will remember that Jesus told His followers to go back to Jerusalem and wait. They did, and their waiting was rewarded.

Ten days later power the like of which they had never seen before came down. Indeed, what happened that day was so outside of human experience that it could only be described through the use of simile.

“There came a sound from heaven *as of* a rushing mighty wind.”

“There appeared unto them cloven tongues *like as* of fire.”

The message I want to bring to you this morning is: That amazing power that came down at Pentecost is still available. It is available to you!

If we don't have it, it is because we haven't asked for it or because we've been asleep in the pew. But power for what?

First, power for witness and proclamation. Think about what happened that first Christian Pentecost. Those who had previously been hunkered down behind closed doors went out and began to announced Jesus. Their timidity went away.

Isn't this what is needed in Christian circles today?

We need someone to push us out of our nests of comfort . . . just as a mamma bird does her young.

Well, that Someone is the Holy Spirit. Ask Him to push you out of your nest. Dare to be a witness.

And there are sorts of ways of being a witness. Let the Spirit lead you in finding your way. Not all of us can preach like Peter, but all can do something.

Power for witness and proclamation – yes. But the Holy Spirit brings power in another way as well: He opens ears and hearts.

Again, think about what happened on that first Christian Pentecost. Peter stood up and preached, but it was by the power of the Holy Spirit that 3000 came to Christian faith that day.

Luke tells us that those who heard Peter's words were 'pricked in their heart'. Well, it was the Holy Spirit that did the pricking.

But, what does this aspect of the work of the Holy Spirit mean to us today?

Well, it should give us new confidence in God's Word and in our own efforts to deliver it. We plant the seed, but God the Holy Spirit brings that seed to life. Success does not depend so much on my cleverness, but on God's power.

But what else does the Holy Spirit do? What about keeping God's people together and on track. That takes a lot of power, doesn't it?

As the Pentecost story opens, we hear: "They were all with one accord in one place."

But did this unity continue? For a while it did.

"And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers," Luke goes on to tell us.

What kept them together? What enabled them not only to believe the Gospel but to live it? /// The Holy Spirit.

That Christians are so divided today is not an indictment on the Holy Spirit, but on ourselves. We have neglected the Gift.

We've allowed ourselves to become distracted and haven't avail ourselves of the power that is ours as believers.

I like how J. B. Philips renders one of the opening verses of Romans 12:

"Don't let the world around you squeeze you into its own mould."

Isn't that what we have allowed to happen? But, what are we going to do about it?

The Holy Spirit can make it go in the other direction as well He can press us into God's mould.

You don't have to be a fearful, timid, purposeless person. You can be a faith-filled, bold and purpose-driven.

Ask the Spirit to come and through you to set a world that is on fire with hate, falsehood and anarchy on fire with love, truth and Jesus.

And when you 'have found it' – or rather have been found of God and filled with His Spirit . . . you might just want to do something very un-Anglican: Stand up and shout – “Praise the Lord” or even “Eureka”.