

A letter from Canon David Nason

Dear Friends

There is no doubt about it; Saint Luke certainly had a great ability to paint an atmospheric scene not in water colours or oils but in words. His description in the Book of the Acts of the Apostles of the scene at the Feast of Pentecost, which we commemorate today, is no exception. Pentecost was one of the great Jewish Festivals. It took place fifty days after the Feast of the Passover and it commemorated the handing down of the Ten Commandments to Moses on Mount Sinai and celebrated the first fruits of the new harvest. People from all over the Jewish world flocked to Jerusalem and there would have been a tremendous atmosphere; movement, energy and excitement. It must have been rather like those nostalgic, filmed scenes that we saw recently of people celebrating VE Day in London seventy five years ago.

The description in Acts is not meant to be an eye-witness account that is literally true but a description invoking the powerful imagery of wind and fire, both traditional representations of God in the Old Testament. We are left in doubt that there was something special about this particular Pentecost. So special that after it the disciples felt empowered to go out at the risk of their own lives and preach the Good News, The Gospel. Despite the fact that they were Galileans, everyone could understand what they were saying on that momentous day. I had a similar experience some years ago when I was co-leading an Inter-Church Travel trip to China. On the Sunday morning we went to a Christian Church with a very charismatic leader who preached a sermon in Chinese. Although I could not literally understand a word I could get the gist and I could even laugh at the jokes. By coincidence it was actually taking place on the Feast of Pentecost.

Last Sunday morning, a colleague and friend from college days, Canon Stephen Ferns, the Cathedral Treasurer preached a sermon beginning with an explanation of the Mandarin word for 'crisis'. He told us that it consisted of two characters, one meaning danger and one meaning opportunity. It is that second character that I would like to pick up on in this letter and combine it

with the empowerment felt by those first disciples on that Feast of Pentecost two thousand years ago.

This is an empowerment given to us all when we are baptised and strengthened when we are confirmed. This time of lockdown gives us all time to reflect on our lives and on our lifestyles. How best can we use that empowerment, even now and when things get back nearer to what we used to call normal? If ever they do! In a way it can be seen like a retreat, a time to charge our spiritual batteries so that when the time comes we are fully ready and empowered to live out our Christian lives to the full.

In the section of St. John's Gospel that we call the 'Farewell Discourses' Jesus, on the night before his crucifixion, is preparing his disciples for when he leaves them. He explains to them about sending a Comforter, a Counsellor who would bear witness to him, the Holy Spirit who would empower them to go out into the world so that they in their turn could also bear witness to him. In other words, Christ's work and teaching had been confined to one person now through the gift of the Holy Spirit they and many more can be empowered to carry it on. In fact all who believe and are baptised into Christ and follow his ways can spread the Good News

Finally, Jesus tells his disciples that the Holy Spirit will lead them into greater understanding. "The spirit of truth will guide you into all truth". And so my message to you this Pentecost is not only to keep seeking through prayer, through contemplation, through reading the bible and also the great spiritual classics of bygone ages but also in the empowerment of the Holy Spirit to witness in your own lives to the truth about Jesus Christ as you understand it, in all that you say and do.

Every good wish

Father David