

Sermon 7.05.2017

Focus Scripture : Acts 2. 42-47.

Well here we are the First Sunday after Ricky. Eight years have passed.

Many faces came in that door and went out that door over those years. Some stayed long enough to become friends but ,as with all congregations, when many are expats, ,,,,folk move on and we miss them.....but others arrive and sit where those friends once satand in turn they too grow into friendships enriching us all.

There is an old Irish saying: '*Ar scath a cheile a mhaireann na daoine*'....'We live in each others shadows' we are not meant to live in isolation.

This truth is as valid now as it was for the biblical Ruth:

"when, sick for home,/She stood in tears amid the alien corn;"

That lonely image of Ruth, a foreigner, a stranger in a foreign land, and foreign culture is a potent Mission- Image for us here in St Clements... especially today we start a new chapter in our walk with the Holy Spirit of God.

People/ strangers / like all of us once were here....still step through our doors,,,,, consciously or not..... responding to the nudgings calls of God.

For in God's economy coincidence is an illusion. In fact coincidence is the currency of heaven.

We never know what weighs on the heart of any person who walks in the door of our church; but we **can make sure...** through genuinely manifesting the welcoming warmth of Jesus have them

leave this place of worship with the call of God's love and Christ's hope resonating in their hearts.

Meeting the spiritual needs of the English speaking peoples in the Czech Republic is our major focus. But I sense a new challenge, for us. Let us not just sit and wait for our Shepherd to nudge new folk in our door.... but let us, His disciples, seek to deepen our relationship with Christ so that His beauty shines wherever we are;) Creating a desire and hunger for Him. For there is still plenty of room for wandering folk in this banquetting hall :)

Over 8 years, God through Ricky consolidated this congregation and helped it recover from the long period when sadly we had no regular chaplain.

Solidly he built up our skills and expertise. The widest range of folk volunteered for various tasks and responsibilities ..responsibilities which go hand in hand with building up competences and confidence of individuals within the congregation.

Now tempus has fugited and Ricky has retired.

And the Holy Spirit has placed the ball firmly in our court....though with advantage to St Clements.

As sixteen months ago, in the love and foresight, the Holy Spirit, had Nathaniel and Aditi walked through our doors direct from the Church of North India and settled them amongst us. Now Nathaniel has graciously agreed to be our interim chaplain...and we welcome him in the name of the Lord.

In the realm of Divine Providence no one knows what a day may bring! We worship a wonderfully creative God. A God not made in our image and likeness. But a God who loves the improbable and

delights in the making 'the impossible' possible. Remember He ruined every funeral He attended, including His own.

Turning now to our readings I would like to focus on the reading from Acts. It is most providential....for in this passage we have a lightning summary of the key characteristics of a vibrant spirit filled community.

For the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in Pentecost produced not just momentary enthusiasm but birthed in believers **four great desires...** Desires which gave the community direction.

The **desires** to:

- 1.to learn,
- 2.to care,
- 3.to fellowship and
- 4.to worship.

Let's look briefly at the passage. But first a little context.

Prior to our reading,we have the stunning events of the Day of Pentecost followed by a totally transformed Peter who fearlessly preaches:

"Men of Judea and all who dwell in Jerusalem,let this be known to you, and give ear to my words... Let all the house of Israel ...know for certain that God has made Him (Jesus) both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified."

Peter sermon was so effective that:

'... those who received his word were baptised and there were added that day about 3,000 souls" (to the infant fellowship).

In this embryonic church we see the Holy Spirit's gold standard in action.

1/4 The believers... devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.

They devoted themselves....

The word 'devoted' can also be rendered *continued steadfastly...*
'attending to...committing themselves to....

the apostles' teaching and fellowship,

Learning was important to the early believers... learning and listening to what the apostles and scriptures taught.

One evidence of growth in our relationship with the Holy Spirit of Jesus is an increasing desire to know more about Him. To seek Him out.

The riches in Christ Jesus are inexhaustible. In any great loving relationship.... we are ever going forward and deeper into the mysteries of love. The Holy Spirit is our Tutor and Guide into the mystery 'of Christ in us, the hope of glory.'

The early church loved **fellowship**; it spontaneously sought togetherness. The members bonded/banded together through common prayer and common life and common experience of a living God..

It was also a **praying** church— devoted *to the breaking of bread and prayers.*

They 'trusted not in their own wisdom' but always sought the mind of God before they went out to engage with an unbelieving world. They could have confidence in their activities because they had first sought the mind of God in relation to plans and projects.

We must learn to always pray bigger than our faith.... ;))

2/4 Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles.

It was a **reverent awe-struck** Christian community.

Awe ,(which contains an element of fear) ,*came upon everyone*,

The Holy Spirit was very active among them. They witnessed *many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles.*

The church was filled with the palpable presence of God—manifesting in signs and wonders. If we expect great things from God and attempt great things for God.... things happen.

As long as *'Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever.'*...miracles will happen. God is the God of the supernatural. Time to take Jesus at His word and, in faith, lean into the excitement of holding God to His promises.

Again, time to launch out and pray bigger than our faith. It is the only way it will grow.

3/4 All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need

Did you notice, in this sentence an all embracing 'all' is used 3 times.

All who believed were together

The believers *held all things in common;*

They distributed *to all, as any had need.*

Sharing was/is part of church...members had an intense feeling of responsibility for each other. They pooled resources. In an expression of their Spirit-inspired togetherness... need was not ignored. To meet needs within the community, they went without themselves. Generosity of heart is a great indicator of the Holy Spirit's presence. These believers knew sacrificial giving.

They would sell their possessions and goods.

There were observable side-effects in the lives of those involved with Divine intimacy

4/4 Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.

In Acts we see the prayer in Lord's Prayer being answered...As it is in heaven so it is on earth.

The church congregation was a **worshipping, hospitable** one. People visiting, meeting and praying with each other.

Great things can happen when we come together. God's Spirit moves upon/among his worshipping people.

Daily the community broke bread together in homes...sharing a meal, beginning the meal with the breaking of bread and ending it with the cup of the Lord's Supper.

*(they)ate **their** food with glad and generous hearts, praising God.*

And the believers had *the goodwill of all the people.*

The result of this miracle of Grace?

day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.

God's plan is for churches to grow. We co-labour with Him.

Our challenge is.....

"Will we meet the Scriptural conditions for church growth...
Trusting the Holy Spirit to help us grow into being an even better
learning, caring, worshipping church fellowship?"

But will we commit ourselves to an even more crucial condition ?

Will we commit ourselves to 'pray unceasingly' for these
qualities?

For prayer is where hearts engage....it's an engagement in
fellowship with God for the purpose of change...

Praying is the empowering dynamo, without which, nothing of
true spiritual consequence happens within us.

Amen