**Reflection 8 June 2025 Rev Wayne Toleafoa**

**Come, Holy Spirit, Come**

**Genesis 11:1-9 ; Acts 2:1-21 ; John 14:8-17, 25-27**

Today is the birthday of the Christian Church - Pentecost Sunday. It comes 50 days after the resurrection and coincides with the original Jewish agricultural Feast of Pentecost. A feast day which is celebrated 50 days after the Feast of the Passover. The Passover symbolizing freedom from enslavement in Egypt.

For us Christians, the Passover Meal became the Last Supper, or the Sacrament of Holy Communion, also known as the Eucharist, or the Mass.

Pentecost signalled a new spiritual movement coming out of Judaism. A movement that became the Christian Church. A movement which eventually eclipsed the Jewish Faith from which it came.

By coincidence, today is also the Sunday nearest to the Feast of St Columba, after whom this church is named. St Columba’s Day is tomorrow, 09 June. So, it’s a double celebration for us here at St Columba’s.

We even have a birthday cake which we will share later, during the morning tea.

St Columba, if you didn’t know it, was an Irish saint who brought the gospel to Scotland. The Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa NZ grew out of the Church of Scotland. The Church of Scotland indirectly owes its life to St Columba.

If you didn’t know it, the foundation stone of this church came from the Abbey of Iona where St Columba set up his mission base for the conversion of Scotland. We remember St Columba today.

Pentecost Sunday is /should be one of the happiest days in the church year, because we are celebrating the coming of the Holy Spirit to the first Christian church, who are our spiritual ancestors.

We heard the familiar account of the first Christian Pentecost written by Luke, in the Acts of the Apostles Chapter 2.

In the background of this story is the mythical Story of the Tower of Babel, which is also one of our readings.

In the Babel Story, the people were punished for their pride. God confused the communication between the people. They began to speak different languages instead of the one language which unified them.

The Pentecost Story is a reversal of the Tower of Babel.

People were unified by the Holy Spirit. Even though the gathered crowd came from different races and cultures, they heard the Spirit of God speaking - through the Apostles - in ‘their’ own languages.

**Sadly, misunderstandings have arisen in some churches when it comes to speaking in tongues.**

Nathan Nettleton, an Australian Baptist minister, righty draws the distinction between – speaking in tongues and speaking in other languages.

On the day of Pentecost, the multi-cultural crowd heard the Apostles and others, speaking in their own languages, which we can only put down to an unexplained miracle.

Speaking in tongues is something different altogether. It is the gift of an intimate language by which we speak to God. The term ‘glossolalia’ has been given to this kind of language. A language which may not even be understood by the speaker. It is ‘God language’ if you like.

St Paul gives this explanation of the use of glossolalia:

*2 For anyone who speaks in a tongue does not speak to people but to God. Indeed, no one understands them; they utter mysteries by the Spirit. 3 But the one who prophesies speaks to people for their strengthening, encouraging and comfort. 4 Anyone who speaks in a tongue edifies themselves, but the one who prophesies edifies the church. 5 I would like every one of you to speak in tongues, but I would rather have you prophesy. The one who prophesies is greater than the one who speaks in tongues, unless someone interprets, so that the church may be edified.18 I thank God that I speak in tongues more than all of you. 19 But in the church, I would rather speak five intelligible words to instruct others than ten thousand words in a tongue.*

**In Acts 2 Peter offered an explanation for what occurred at the first Pentecost by quoting from the radical prophecy of Joel**

“In the last days it will be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams. Even upon my slaves, both men and women,
 in those days I will pour out my Spirit; and they shall prophesy.

**It is a radical prophecy for several reasons:**

Firstly, God’s Spirit will be poured out on ‘all flesh’- not just the Jewish people. There will be no distinction between prophets and lay people.

Secondly, ‘Sons and daughters’ will prophecy. The office of prophet once occupied by men only, will be given to women also. ‘Sons and daughters’ also suggest that the Spirit will come to every generation – to parents and their sons and daughters.

Thirdly, young men shall see visions – will be able to see the possibilities of the future and have the energy to fulfill the visions. Older men will dream dreams – and be able to see the broader sweep of God’s grace.

Fourthly, even slaves, men and women, will receive the Holy Spirit, and be able to prophecy. The barrier between slave and master will be broken down.

**In short, the Holy Spirit acted to break down the barriers between people, Barriers between genders. Between generations. Between cultures and between classes.**

St Paul provided a snapshot of how the Early Church should be, in his Letter to the Galatians. *(Galatians 3:28)*

**‘28**There is no longer Jew or Greek; there is no longer slave or free; there is no longer male and female, for all of you are one in Christ Jesus’.

**That is what the early church became because of the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. It is still how the church should be in our day.**

**It’s a great experience to be travelling overseas and to be able to drop into Christian Churches where the barriers of culture have been broken down.**

I haven’t travelled as much as some of you, but I have been to at least twenty-five countries where I've managed to find a church to worship in on a Sunday.

Some memorable churches included St Peters in the Vatican, Westminster Abbey, St Paul’s Cathedral London, Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris and a Roman Catholic Church of St Anthony in Istanbul and church services in the Cook Islands.

Even when I couldn’t understand some of the local languages, (France, Italy & Turkey) I could understand the movements of the liturgies/orders of service – especially when Holy Communion was celebrated.

I could still enter into the spirit of the worship and feel the warmth of the Holy Spirit in the fellowship of the people. I felt as though we were one, despite our differences. The work of the Holy Spirit.

I've mentioned this before to my congregation, but I grew up in the generation where the Trinity was described as “Father, Son and Holy ‘Ghost’”.

Until I was about 19, I thought the Holy Ghost was the zombie like ghost of Jesus coming out of the tomb.

I had some very close friends who were involved in the charismatic movement of the 1970s. They explained Acts 2 to me and opened my eyes to understand the Holy Spirit as, ‘the presence of God in the world and within us’.

It was like the scales had been removed from my eyes. I saw the greatness, the awesomeness of God for the first time and felt so humbled before this awesome God!

I believe that I speak God-Language – an intimate language between God and myself – but I don’t think I’m anyone more special than any other Christian.

I realize that there are problems when one person thinks the Holy Spirit is leading the church one way, and others believe the Spirit is leading in another direction. The litmus test for me is, ‘is the choice a loving choice?’ or is it based on bias?

At Pentecost, God the Holy Spirit came as One who breaks down barriers. One who offers us an intimacy with God. One who blows with the freedom of the wind and flames, leading us to a new freedom.

The God news is that Jesus promised to give the Holy Spirit to anyone who invites the Holy Spirit to come into their lives.

Come, Holy Spirit, Come.

PRAYER

Holy Spirit, Helper and Guide

You called Columba

To leave the security of his home

To follow you to places unknown

And blessed his work

Done in the name of Christ

You blew your refreshing Spirit

Over your Church at Pentecost

And set their hearts ablaze with your life

Come to us today, refresh and renew our Spirit

Inspire our imaginations and our hearts

That we may serve you today

In the name of the same Lord, Jesus Christ. Amen.