

**Pentecost - 8th June 2014  
Clanfield and Bampton**

**At *Messy Church* last week, we thought a bit about the Holy Spirit as the wind, or breath of God - the unseen Spirit who 'blows where he will' - the wind you can't see, but whose effects can be seen and heard and felt. It's a powerful image and a very fruitful one for meditating on the power and effect of God's presence in our human lives.**

**Today's Gospel provides us with another way of thinking about the Spirit as Jesus speaks about the 'living waters', flowing 'out of the believer's heart' (John 7:38). Wind, water - there's clearly something elemental about the nature of God's Spirit as he enters our lives. He comes to blow away the cobwebs, fill us with boldness and confidence, like the flabby balloons we blew up last week to make the message they were carrying plain for all to see. the wind of God enabling his people in mission and evangelism.**

**He comes, too, to refresh us with living water - water which not only quenches our own thirst but flows out of us to meet the needs of the thirsty ones around us. Here is another picture of the mission of the Church and the Christian, bringing the living waters of God to a world who needs to know him and drink deeply of his love and generous forgiveness.**

**But the other great image we draw from the account of the coming of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost is the one of fire: *Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them* (Acts 2:3), lighting up the lives of those disciples in the upper room as they prayed for the promised ‘power from on high’ that Jesus had said they would receive.**

**Fire seems to be a more dangerous, a more ‘edgy’ kind of picture of the way God works. Now admittedly wind can be very violent, dangerous and destructive as well as gentle or bracing and stirring: and no-one experiencing the power of this winter’s floods, or the vast destructive raging of the sea, should ever underestimate the force of water.**

**But fire is never to be taken lightly - its capacity to warm us and make us feel comfortable and snug can so easily and quickly turn to something far more dangerous.**

**Many, many years ago, our son, Daniel, who was then very small, but had a terrible fascination with plugs and electric sockets, managed to find an electric blanket in a drawer in an upstairs cupboard and, unbeknownst us, he plugged it in.**

**It was the smoke and the burning smell that first alerted us that something was wrong - and we lived in an old vicarage which in those days had no smoke alarms fitted.**

**I found the blanket smouldering warmly away on the bedroom floor. It was close to a window, so not very wisely, I unplugged it and hurled it out of the window. Of course it burst spectacularly into flame and blackened the grass onto which it fell. Being west Wales, the grass was wet and there was no danger of starting an even more dangerous blaze. But it was a timely reminder that even something designed to keep you warm and cosy could, if misused or underestimated, become a source of real danger.**

**So what does this say about the Holy Spirit? Well, in the first place it reminds us that God can never be underestimated - we can never dare to think that we have God 'taped'. He does love us and comfort us - he is gentle and patient with us, he is the Good Shepherd who tirelessly goes in search of his straying sheep and brings us home rejoicing. He does quench our thirst, shelter and protect us when the world is cold and dark and dangerous. But, he is also beyond our understanding; he is to be worshipped and respected not treated simply like an old friend who is always safe and predictable.**

**I think we see this often enough in the Gospels with Jesus, who was more than capable of burning with fiery zeal -as when he drove the money-changers and others out of the Temple precinct, or rounded on poor old Peter, calling him Satan, when he clearly misunderstood**

**the nature of Jesus' ministry of sacrifice which would end in suffering and death. Jesus, too, on several occasions, terrified his disciples with his obvious power - calming the storm on the lake, walking on water, telling fishermen with a lifetime's experience where they would find a great catch of fish - and bringing Peter, again, to his knees - a sinner in the presence of God's awesome holiness.**

**God's majesty and glory are not to be trifled with - we worship one who is the maker of the universe, the ground of all being, the one whose hands, as the hymn puts it 'flung stars into space'. 'Our God is a consuming fire', as the writer of the Letter to the Hebrews put it (Heb. 12:29) - *..Let us be thankful and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, for our God is a consuming fire.***

**And just as God wants us to taste the freedom and exhilaration of the wind of his Spirit; just as he wants us to drink deeply of the water of life which his Spirit brings us, so he wants us to know something of his fire in our hearts - an energy which lifts us out of a dull, grey, possibly flabby faith. On the Day of Pentecost those disciples and other followers of Jesus were certainly set on fire - enthusiastic to preach the Gospel, on fire to bring others to know the living God and his Messiah, Jesus, the Saviour. *Come Holy Ghost our souls inspire and lighten with celestial fire* - that's the old hymn we still sing at**

**Ordination and Confirmation services, and we always need that fire if we are to serve the God whose fire came down at Pentecost and whose fire in the hearts and lives of his people is still urgently needed in the world today.**

**These words, whose author is a little uncertain, make the point simply and encourage us to pray on this Feast of Pentecost for the fire from above:**

*Unless the eye catch fire, The God will not be seen.*

*Unless the ear catch fire, The God will not be heard.*

*Unless the tongue catch fire, The God will not be named.*

*Unless the heart catch fire, The God will not be loved.*

*Unless the mind catch fire, The God will not be known.*

**‘Breathe on me, Breath of God, till I am wholly thine;  
until this earthly part of me glows with thy fire divine’ -  
to thy glory and praise. Amen.**