



Pentecost 2023

*Lord, Holy Spirit,
You blow like the wind in a thousand paddocks,
Inside and outside the fences,
You blow where you wish to blow.
James K. Baxter from Thoughts about the Holy Spirit*

Dear friends,

I still recall it vividly. I was a member of the Connexional Candidates Committee at the time. The committee met together with candidates at a centre owned by the Roman Catholic Diocese of Westminster. At morning prayers one day, the worship leader began with a sung invocation of the Holy Spirit from the Iona Community:

*Come, Holy Spirit. Come, Holy Spirit,
Maranatha! Come, Lord, come.*

We repeated each line after the cantor but we were invited to hold the note at the end of the line as the cantor began the next one. Though it was a simple liturgical act, I found it profoundly moving being held together in perfect unity and harmony as we formed a shared community united by one note. I felt a tingle down my spine. But this was not just a human act. There was something more, something else, a profound sense of God moving amongst us in the power of the Spirit.

I have experienced the reality of the Spirit in many different settings: in silent prayer; in ecstatic, charismatic worship; in more catholic liturgical settings; alone on a beach; together with a party of friends or colleagues; in times of protest and yearning for justice; in acts of creativity; perhaps most often in moments when I least expected it or most needed it; in moments of great sorrow and of immense joy. I am sure you could both add to this list and resonate with some if not most of these experiences in your own faith journey. Yet for all the richness of the Spirit's work in our lives, the Spirit, as one theologian put it, remains the 'poor relation' in our experience of God as Trinity.

It's fascinating to note that in an age which often characterises itself as being spiritual rather than religious, that we speak so little about the work of the Spirit in our lives, in our communities, in creation and redemption.

Is that something we need to change? Is there something we need to rediscover here for our lives and mission? Should we spend more time waiting upon the Spirit before we even contemplate 'our' agenda? Lesslie Newbigin reminds us that the Holy Spirit is central to the life of mission. The Spirit he tells us is not domesticated within the Church nor is the Spirit the property of the Church:

'On the contrary, the active agent of mission is a power that rules, guides and goes before the Church: the free, sovereign living power of the Spirit of God. Mission is not just something that the Church does; it is something that is done by the Spirit, who is the witness, who changes both the world and the Church, who always goes before the Church in its missionary journey' (The Open Secret, p.56)

As we remember the gift of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, I pray that God might breathe on each one of us afresh and fill us with life anew.

Veni Sancte Spiritus!

Revd Richard Andrew

District Chair