

Hearts on fire at Pentecost

There are certain experiences in life that **transform our physical appearance.**

When our first grandson was born you should have seen his mother's face! She was radiant with joy. Also his father was glowing with pleasure as he held the newborn child! Recently our goddaughter received an Olivier award on behalf of the English National Opera at the Royal Albert Hall. Her whole appearance was overflowing with joy.

In an even more stunning way the first disciples were transformed by the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. In our first reading: *“On the day of Pentecost all the believers were meeting together in one place. Suddenly, there was a sound from heaven like the roaring of a mighty wind, and it filled the house where they were sitting. Then, what looked like flames or tongues of fire appeared and settled on each one of them. And everyone present was filled with the Holy Spirit.”*

The first thing to notice is that there wasn't an actual wind. There was a sound **like** the roaring of the wind. And there wasn't an actual fire. What looked **like** flames appeared and settled on each one of them. The writer of Acts is trying to explain the difference that the coming of the Holy Spirit made to the appearance of the early disciples as they were touched by the fire of God's love.

The second thing to notice is that the Holy Spirit settled “on each one of them.” The Holy Spirit doesn't fill church buildings, not even St Paul's cathedral or Lambeth Palace! The Holy Spirit doesn't fill organisations, denominations or institutions. **The Holy Spirit fills people.** In our reading from John's gospel when Jesus promises the Holy Spirit he says *“he lives with you and will be in you.”*

The Holy Spirit is here this morning not because of the building but because of the people, because of you and me. This afternoon the Holy Spirit will be in Trafalgar Square not because it's a famous place in London but because of the thousands of believers gathering there to celebrate Pentecost. When you go home for lunch the Holy Spirit will be there in the house because of you - *"he lives with you and will be in you."*

The third thing to notice is that the change in the disciples appearance was like fire. John the Baptist said that Jesus would baptise the disciples "with the Holy Spirit and with fire." **Why fire?**

Fire speaks of purifying and cleansing.

The prophet Isaiah describes a vision where he saw the Lord sitting high up in the temple. As he contemplated the holiness of God Isaiah became aware of his own sinfulness. Then he saw a seraph bringing a burning coal from the altar. He touched his lips with the burning coal and said "Your sins are forgiven and your guilt is taken away."

The disciples of Jesus had sinned and failed in so many ways. As they were filled with the Spirit they received a baptism of fire, purifying and cleansing them.

Fire speaks of passion and devotion

Just a few weeks before, two of the disciples had been walking along the road to Emmaus when the risen Jesus joined them. As they talked about their experience afterwards they said "Didn't our hearts burn within us." On the day of Pentecost the disciples hearts burst into flame with their devotion to Jesus and it showed in their appearance.

Our diocese of Southwark has adopted this theme of "Hearts on Fire" to encourage us all to walk with Jesus day by day getting to know him better.

Fire spreads

On the day of Pentecost the fire began with the believers and spread to the crowd in Jerusalem so that 3000 were added to the church on that day. Peter gave them a remarkable promise: *“Turn to God and be baptised in the name of Jesus and you will Receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. This promise is to you and your children and to all whom the Lord will call.”* Part of this verse can be translated, this promise is to “people far in the future.” (NLT)

The promise of the Holy Spirit stretches down through history, has been received by millions through the centuries and is enjoyed by millions today. Each one of our lives can be a living flame, spreading the good news of Jesus.

How can each one of us know **more** of the Holy Spirit today?

“More” is the key word. 4 Ways from the New Testament that I have found helpful:

- Spend time every day with the giver of the Spirit
- Open your heart to receive spiritual gifts
- Stir up the Spirit in you with spiritual songs
- Enjoy the company of spiritual people

**More and more,
I want to magnify His name;
More and more,
I want to spread abroad His fame.
More and more,
O make my life a living flame;
Melt my heart,
Precious Lord More and more**