

## NO MISSING LINKS

I read a magazine article this week which said that everybody in church this Sunday will have had their own "Pentecost experience" at some point in their lives.

So let's start by going back to that story in the Bible: the followers of Jesus being suddenly aware of a great surge of power; and how they went out into the streets where they shouted and laughed, danced and sang until the people around them accused them of being drunk. Is this what a "Pentecost experience" is about?

Maybe some of us can recall a time when we shouted and laughed, danced and sang in the streets.

And maybe then people accused us of being drunk.....

And it is quite possible that we were drunk and that the spirit which was influencing us might be known as "God's gift," just not in quite the same way.

Having said this, there are of course many Christian worship services in which people are inspired by the true spirit of God to make a lot of noise, feel free to dance and lift their hands, speak in strange tongues- although this tends to take place within buildings or marquees rather than out in the public streets. Now this experience sounds far more like the Pentecost story in the Bible and there are some of you here today who will think how wonderful it would be if our church services were more like that. And there are others of you who are thinking *if they start all that business then I am out of here.*

What we call the "Charismatic Movement" has certainly rejuvenated the Christian church in the most amazing ways. Unfortunately it has also caused a certain amount of controversy and uneasiness because not everybody feels that it is right for them. In one of Miss Read's books there is a story of a Junior School teacher who is leading her class in a dancing session. She puts some lively music on and tells the children to imagine that they are little lambs skipping around in the warm sunshine. "*Smell the flowers, taste the fresh grass, look around at the lovely blue sky and skip, skip high, skip for joy.*" The class do their best to skip, all except one little boy who is feeling rather tired and fed up. He just stands still. The teacher rushes over and gives him a smack on the back of the legs. *Now will you skip for joy,* she says.

OK, nowadays she would get arrested for hitting him but you take the point- she was trying to force him into a state of ecstasy. NOW will you skip for joy?

People may be coerced into skipping but they cannot be coerced into joy. Telling them that the gift of the Holy Spirit should be inspiring them into a state of abandoned rapture and that they are inadequate Christians if it does not (and sorry, but I have heard people say this) causes some men and women either to react fiercely against anything which might suggest "happy-clappy" in their church and some to give up on Christianity altogether. They feel that they cannot-for whatever reason- skip for joy and if they are to be bullied into doing so, on Pentecost or any other Sunday, then they would rather withdraw from the class.

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So does this mean that in fact there will be many here today who have not have had "a Pentecost Experience?" (And who quite possibly do not want one either...)

Going back to the story, the singing and the dancing in the streets was not the Pentecost Experience. That was the result of the Pentecost Experience. This group of

people felt a great surge of power coming into them- this was their Pentecost Experience. The way that experience affected them was to send them out into the streets to shout and sing and proclaim the Christian Gospel.

Elsewhere in the Bible we hear of people experiencing this power but using it in different ways. There were stories of mighty warriors who, in the days when Israel was a tiny nation, threatened by superpowers, were filled with the spirit of God and achieved amazing victories in battle. There were stories of Kings who were filled with the spirit of God and so were able to be wise in their judgements and strong in their ruling. There were stories of preachers who were filled with the spirit and so became inspiring and compelling speakers. There was Isaiah who said the Spirit of Lord filled him so that he could comfort the broken-hearted and bind up the wounded. There was Jesus himself who said that the Spirit of God gave him the power to heal diseases and cast out inner demons. And right at the start of the Bible, it was God's spirit that transformed the earth from a chaotic, watery waste into a planet that could sustain life.

The Spirit of God can affect anybody and in an endless variety of ways. The Spirit of God is given to you to use in the way that you most need and that the world round around you most needs.

Some of you may know already that our Toddler Group here celebrates its thirtieth birthday this year and we are planning a big event in November-watch this space. Thirty years ago the Spirit of God came upon a young mother with a small child and inspired her to start this group. Over the years that same spirit of God has led others to offer help, to take over leadership, to try out new ideas and we now have to hold two group meetings in one morning because there are too many toddlers for one group. And over the years many families have been drawn into the church and into the Christian faith because of that Toddler Group. Today we have baptised Lily Jackson who has been brought to our Toddler Group. And if you do not think that starting up and maintaining a Toddler Group is a "Pentecost Experience" then, as George Macleod said, *I hope you have a very boring life.*

That article I read was right was it not? Everybody has a "Pentecost Experience" of their own. And no two people will be inspired in exactly the same way.

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The disciples of Jesus-in the story- really needed a dramatic kick-start to their faith and their mission. They were very nervous and unsure of themselves. Their lifestyles, their beliefs, their ideas about life had been overturned during the three years they had spent with Jesus; then the new faith and confidence which had been slowly building up had taken a severe battering when they saw him crucified. They had been thrilled by his resurrection but not sure whether they could really believe their eyes; now Jesus had finally left them and they hid together in a room in Jerusalem, not knowing quite what to do or what was expected of them. And there is nothing worse than people who are supposed to be teaching you something important or convincing you of something vital who just stand there and say, "*well I don't know. I'm not very good at this.*" Those disciples needed to get out there, right that moment, shake off their inhibitions, face crowds of people of all different nationalities and tell them *Jesus Christ is the Son of God and the Saviour of the world.* It was what the disciples needed and what the world around them needed at that particular time.



that is OK. If it does not then that is OK too. The big mistake is to believe that the Spirit of God has somehow passed you by because it is not inspiring you in the same way as it is inspiring others.

So, on Lily Jackson's big day, we pray that she will find plenty to celebrate about being human; that she will have her own Pentecost Experience which will make her aware of God's Spirit in her; that there will be people here in her family, her godparents and this church community who will remind her that she is a child of God and who will encourage her to follow the inspiration of God's Spirit. We pray that she has an exciting life, not a boring one because she has been brought into a world which is filled with God.

Amen.