

Thought for Sunday 23rd May 2021
Pastor Gordon Hamilton

Acts 2:1-41

I would guess that as Christians we think of Pentecost as the day the Holy Spirit came on the early disciples, giving them a new power that became the start of the Christian church, where, as it said in verse 41, *‘about 3,000 were added to their number.’* But the Jewish festival of Pentecost was one of three major Jewish agricultural festivals, the second great feast of the Jewish year, and is a harvest festival. Leviticus 23:15 onwards talks of the feast of weeks, verse 16 says; *‘Count off fifty days up to the day after the seventh Sabbath, and then present an offering of new grain to the Lord.’* Pentecost is derived from the Greek word for fifty. So what we have to remember is that the Lord’s timing is always perfect. We are now seven weeks since we celebrated Easter Sunday, the day Jesus rose from the dead. Ten days ago we celebrated the ascension of Jesus, Thursday week ago. The disciples had been wandering around, a bit like lost sheep. They had seen Jesus after his resurrection, on and off, for forty days. They had seen his ascension and told to, Acts 1:4 & 5, *‘wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. For John baptised with water, but in a few days you will be baptised with the Holy Spirit.’* We know that in those ten days, while they were waiting, they decided to choose a new disciple to replace Judas Iscariot, but they had no idea of how long they would have to wait for the baptism of the Holy Spirit, which Jesus had told them about (Acts 1:5). Chapter 2 begins, *‘When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place.’* Thomas wasn’t missing this time and neither were any of the others. What they then experienced was not what they were expecting, *‘a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them.’* Wow is the only word that I can think of as to how they must have felt, especially after what we read in the next verse (v4) *‘All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.’* As I said a few moments ago, this was at the time of one of the three major Jewish agricultural festivals, Jerusalem was full of Jews, as verse 5 tells us, *‘from every nation under the earth.’* You can read where they are from verses 9-11. I have never been on a pilgrimage but I understand that people’s from all nations and every walk of life go on them, sometimes there is not a common language, but for most the common goal of visiting what they feel is an important site, in whatever their faith is, is most important. Peter realises this is too good an opportunity to miss, and filled with the Holy Spirit he stood up and addressed the crowd. You may be thinking that you could never do that, but filled with the Holy Spirit you can do anything. From somewhere in the back of his mind, maybe the disciples had been talking about it over the previous few days, but Peter remembered the words of the prophet Joel, verses 17-21. They may not have been exact, but these words would have been familiar to some of those who were standing around listening. That would have got their attention, that would have got them thinking, that would have given Peter a certain accreditation and they stopped and listened. Three years before Peter was just a fisherman, the as Matthew 4:19 tells us; *‘Jesus said, ‘Come follow me and I will make you fishers of men.’* Peter, and the other disciples were to spend three years living with Jesus, pretty well 24 x 7, and we all know, you never really know someone until you live with them. I’m sure that my wife, Sue, knows things about me that others don’t, maybe I have some annoying habits, and she knows my flaws, she has learnt that I’m not perfect. For Peter and the others they had found out, because of living 2 x 7 with Jesus, that he was perfect. Jesus didn’t do everything for his disciples, Jesus allowed them to realise they were human, whereas he was more than human. Jesus allowed them to realise their humanness, like the time in the boat

when the storm rose and they panicked while Jesus slept. Finally they woke him up and he just said, *'Be still,'* and the storm abated. There were no flaws in Jesus. Peter had messed up, Peter had denied Jesus, as Jesus told him he would. But Peter had been forgiven by Jesus and told to *'Feed his sheep,'* suddenly Peter realised the responsibility he had been given. Yes, he was a sinner, but he was a sinner saved by grace. Peter now had to step up to the mark, there was no denying Jesus again. This was the opportunity Peter has to share his faith, to talk about Jesus, to talk about the one who saved him, and because Peter knew Jesus, really knew Jesus, he could share the story of the real Jesus, not the fabrication that the Jewish leaders had put about. **Read verses 22-24...** Peter spoke passionately about Jesus, from a personal point of view, Peter didn't learn about Jesus from a book, Peter wasn't told he had to read lots of religious books and take exams, Peter knew Jesus and he knew that others needed to know the real Jesus. We all need to hear about Jesus and there are times we need to hear it from likeminded people, not people who are ultra religious and want to show how much they know about religion. Because Peter had a personal relationship with his Lord and Saviour, because Peter had a personal relationship with Jesus, he shared what he knew. He knew he had blown it seven weeks before when he had denied he was a follower of Jesus to a young servant girl, he knew he dare not blow it again. As Peter gets to the end of his 'sermon' he states, v36; *'Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ.'* I am sure that many of those who were in Jerusalem, for the Feast of Pentecost, would have heard about Jesus being crucified and would have accepted that he was a charlatan, a fake, a heretic, because that is what the Jewish leaders had said he was. Know they were hearing something different; *'this Jesus, whom you crucified, is both Lord and Christ.'* Which I guess asks the question of us, are we prepared to share our knowledge of our Lord and Saviour, of Jesus? Peter had never preached before and hadn't prepared this sermon in advance, God gave him the right words, and he will for you as well. Amen.

O Breath of Life, come, sweeping through us,
Revive Thy church with life and power.

O Breath of Life, come, cleanse, renew us,
And fit Thy church to meet this hour.

O Wind of God, come, bend us, break us,
Till humbly we confess our need;
Then in Thy tenderness remake us,
Revive, restore; for this we plead.

O Breath of Love, come, breathe within us,
Renewing thought and will and heart:
Come, love of Christ, afresh to win us,
Revive Thy church in every part.

Revive us, Lord! is zeal abating
While harvest fields are vast and white?
Revive us, Lord, the world is waiting,
Equip Thy church to spread the light.