

(Acts 2:1-21; Romans 8:14-17; John 14:8-17)

In our first reading, from Acts, about the Day of Pentecost, we heard that the disciples were gathered ‘together in one place’. And that many languages were heard.

Today, *we* are gathered together, each with our own understanding and experience of God’s presence and God’s gifting. Just as the coming of the Holy Spirit on that first day of Pentecost, that ‘birthday of the Church’, was difficult to describe, to put in to language, so it is for us today. Somehow, God’s presence and God’s gifting is beyond words: in its sheer diversity it is richly transcendent!

Yesterday, I had the privilege of attending a gathering of the Diocesan Synod. There we were, representatives from each Deanery in this diverse Diocese of Leeds, gathered ‘together in one place’. And Bishop Nick made two points when it comes to language.

First, when speaking about the values of the Kingdom of God it is easier for us to *use* terms such as ‘inclusive’ or ‘mutual flourishing’ than it is to *inhabit* them. So whether we are considering the Church of England as a whole or this parish church of Richmond with Hudswell, we must be careful to say what we mean, and to mean what we say. At all times, we must seek the guidance of the grace of the Holy Spirit.

And Bishop Nick’s second point was that the Church of England surely has an important part to play in helping to resolve the current Brexit impasse. He suggested that on both sides of the debate, what people are saying and what they mean may be different things. So for example, in simple terms, expressions of discontent with Europe may actually be about discontent with Westminster. And yet the hurt felt by people who see themselves as unheard and isolated from the centre is replicated by the hurt felt by those who see themselves as no longer welcome in their community. The Church therefore has a role to play in bringing divided – diverse – communities together ‘in one place’ so that people with different points of view can find a common language, and really *listen* to one another.

Now in her sermon last week, Gillian reminded us that Pentecost is ‘when we celebrate the gift of the Holy Spirit which fires us up, empowers us, nudges us, and encourages us’. ‘[It] is a wonderful time for us to be considering where we believe God is calling us to be, both as individuals and as a church community’. So Pentecost is a time for us to celebrate the diversity of ‘our own understanding and experience of God’s presence and God’s gifting’.

I hope you have had a chance to see Gillian’s sermon on our website, and the slides that went with it. She set out the story so far of the development of a new vision and strategy for our church. In expanding on my article in the June parish magazine, she reminded us that as a church we need to know where we are going and how we will get there. We all need to ‘own’ our vision and strategy by having a part to play in it.

So as we heard last week, if we are to move forward in worship and prayer, in outreach and community service, then we need to grow as disciples and in our care for one another. And all this needs to be resourced through healthy finances, buildings which are fit for purpose, and efficient administration. This implies that we each have a part to play, that God is calling us, together, to be *a people and a place where love works*.

Our resources are finite so we have to be focused, to avoid taking a ‘scattergun’ approach to what needs to be done! As a church and as individuals, we have to listen for what we believe God is calling us to be and to do. As a ‘starter for 10’, in Gillian’s slides from last week, she listed some possible priorities – identified by the PCC at their recent Away Day...

This list was split into the areas I mentioned just now: Worship and Prayer, Outreach through Evangelism and Community Service, Discipleship and Pastoral Care, and Infrastructure including Finance, Buildings and Administration.

Gillian also invited each of us to think and to pray during the week about:

What might be missing?

What should we be doing first?

What part is God calling me to be playing?

So I invite you now to spend some time talking and listening about what you feel our top priority as a church should be – including anything missing from the PCC’s list...

[The July/August issue of the parish Magazine will include a questionnaire designed to help us take this further.]

Thanks be to God. Amen.