

## ***A Double Blessing!***

*Acts 2<sup>1-21</sup>; [Psalm 10<sup>26-end</sup>; 1 Corinthians 12<sup>3b-13</sup>] John 20<sup>19-23</sup>*

*[Jesus] breathed on them and said to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit'.  
[John 20<sup>22</sup>]*

Such is the world that we now live in that, when I read the Gospel for today, my first thought was, *Jesus wouldn't get off with breathing all over people today, no matter what the benefit!*

In this reduced service we have to have the reading from the Acts and we have to have a reading from the Gospel – which means that we are not distracted by the list of the Gifts of the Holy Spirit from 1 Corinthians 12 and have to focus on the gift itself.

These two Pentecosts – the one on Easter Day that some call the Johannine Pentecost and the one 50 days later on the Feast of Pentecost itself – serve different purposes but both equip the embryonic Church in its task of proclaiming Jesus as Lord and Saviour.

Away from the dramatics of wind and fire there are perhaps two things that affect us from this double-blessing of Pentecost:

- ✘ The thing that struck me from the account of the day of Pentecost was that the crowd, gathered from the whole Jewish Diaspora, found it remarkable that the Apostles made sense! **In our own languages we hear them speaking about God's deeds of power.**

Reading this, without Paul looming over my thinking, the thing that struck me was that these Christians '*made sense*'! Being the rather naughty schoolboy that I am inside, my next thought was that there are so many Christians who don't make sense at all – not to God, not to others and probably not to themselves!

Perhaps the test of being 'filled with the Holy Spirit' isn't that you speak in tongues, but simply that – inspired by God – we make sense. Where so much doesn't make sense we proclaim that God has everything

under his control; that he created us to love us and loves us still; that before creation he planned how we could be his.

- ✘ The principal thing that we take from John's account is that Christians are given this great gift to forgive or not – **If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.**

All of us need forgiveness and, truth be told, some of us are more willing to be forgiven than we are to forgive. It always saddens me when I hear it said, 'I can never forgive...!' We do have the power to withhold forgiveness, but be careful: we shall pray, **forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us** and that doesn't sit well with 'I can never forgive...' as it means you can never be forgiven!

If God can forgive us the Holy Spirit will empower us to forgive others. Surely that makes sense too.

In many ways we are facing the same sort of opportunity that the Apostles had on that first Feast of Pentecost. Such was God's timing that the intoxicated Apostles were launched on a crowd in Jerusalem at just the point when they had maximum exposure to the then-known world. You can imagine all these people going back to these far-flung places telling the story of what they had experienced. So too, on this Feast of Pentecost, St Mary's Handsworth is reaching (as so many Churches are) people in parts of the world we never thought we would before this.

I am convinced that this is part of something new that God is doing – he is renewing the Church and preparing it for growth and revitalisation and that we will know the joy of many coming to know the truth Peter proclaimed – **everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved!**