

Acts 2.1-17, 21

John 14.8-17, 25-27

'Come, Holy Spirit, and kindle in us the fire of your love.'

Our Pentecost reading from the acts of the apostles:

'suddenly a sound like the rush of a violent wind filled the entire house ...**and divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy spirit.'**

... **divided tongues of fire appeared among them and a tongue rested on each of them**

it must have been quite an **amazing experience to imagine** the room of people each with tongues of fire resting on them.

I have often wondered about these tongues of fire on the day of Pentecost.

we are more used to thinking about the rush of wind and breath and spirit as they all come from the same word in Hebrew, so we know breath & wind & Spirit are connected, but what about fire?

Today, I want to explore the significance of these tongues of fire.

What comes to mind when you think about fire?

1. **Sitting in front of a fire feeling safe in your home** - comfort and warmth

2. sitting around a **camp fire** - again you have the warmth the fascination of looking at the **flames dancing** but also little bit of a **sense of danger** as we've got an open fire

3. Forest **fires** they are dangerous, destructive, devastating, but actually they can be really positive for the ecology they have a cleansing effect burning away old growth making room for the new for New Life

4. **Easter the lighting of the new fire** as a symbol of new life and perhaps to be reminded that when humans discovered fire what a difference it made to the quality of life and human advancement

4x **car engines** where's the spark that burns fuel creates energy and enables the car to move

5. thinking **of fire in towns or cities**

5a. The **Great fire of London** which was so devastating in the 17th century

5b of **Chicago where a fire in the 19th century, 1871**, destroyed much of the city but then made room for Chicago to be rebuilt and becoming the cradle of the high-rise tower

5c and of course more recently the **Grenfell tower fire** so awful so destructive, uncovering human greed and laziness that lead to that awful tragedy; but then in the aftermath perhaps also people coming together being connected as they were morning together and trying to make a difference

6. And then of course there is **the fire of hell**, associated with punishment but also purgatory as a place where the bad is burning away so that goodness can prevail

all these examples are really good reminders **that fire is powerful** ; it's one of the four elements – (interestingly, the only one human beings have some control over) ;

and has lots of good associations, warmth, comfort, improves the quality-of-life, it gives light, cleanses & renews – but also something we fear – something beyond ourselves.

in Christianity 'fire' always been an important symbol, and associated with the holy spirit and new life; in the prayers of the church we find the image:

Come, Holy Spirit and kindle in us the fire of your love Which warms, comforts, drives us to care etc.

At morning prayer, we say the opening prayer ***'as we rejoice in the gift of this new day, set our hearts on fire with love for you.***

the idea that God the Holy spirit kindles in us the fire of love

Jesus's teaching, esp. in John's gospel, about the Holy spirit: comforter; advocate, guide;

and so perhaps it's not surprising that on the first day of Pentecost when the Holy spirit came down and created the church and filled each one of the disciples, the **outward symbol of this was a tongue of fire resting on each one of them.**

If we had **special glasses** to look through here at each other today, we might be able to see these tongues of fire that are at work in each one of us and of course not just on the day of Pentecost but every single day. Hence the prayer everyday 'set our hearts on fire with love for you'.

the spark that energizes us that drives our engine and in contrast to a car, our spark is filled with love, the spark created by the Holy spirit. It drives the engine of our hearts; what motivates us; what we say and do; what we care about; how we reach out to other and do our daily loving.

Pope Francis had a meeting with our archbishop of Canterbury a few weeks ago and archbishop Justin asked him to give a message in support of the 'thy kingdom come' prayer campaign, which is now worldwide, running from Ascension day until Pentecost

And this is what Pope Francis said: (Youtube clip)

'Come holy spirit - that is the promise of the father and the promise of Jesus. So that the Holy spirit may enlarge and widen our hearts. We all have a problem and that is that our hearts tend to shrink, become smaller and close-up.

We can't solve that problem by ourselves.' and then pointing to the sky he added: "only the holy spirit can solve it. Come Holy spirit. And to Jesus, may your kingdom come the kingdom of the father that you came to announce.'

That's why we need to pray – everyday: Come Holy Spiritand thy kingdom come.

I love this idea, that the praying for the holy spirit to come, enlarges and widens our hearts; cleansing us, burning away old growth: stubbornness, selfishness, prejudice, fear, etc. - all that gets in the way of enabling us to be more loving, more compassionate, more kind, more hopeful, more alive.

....changes our behaviour – gives us faith & makes us kinder, more compassionate, generous, ...all the gifts of the Holy Spirit. ...so, we make a difference in the world, connect people, build community, contribute to reconciliation, offer hope, bring trust

Wouldn't it be great, if we could see the flame resting on each of our heads each morning when we pray *'come holy spirit: kindle in me the fire of your love. Enlarge my heart and use me in the service of your Kingdom.'*

We may not see the tongue of fire resting on us, but we can trust the Spirit will fill us and use us, if we pray for this. And allow God, like fire, to sweep the world and transform it. Amen.