

From this morning's Lesson, from the Acts of the Apostles:

*... we do hear them speak in our [own] tongues the wonderful works of God.* Acts 2:11b

It happens to me all the time. Maybe it happens to you as well. A small sound; a voice; a few bars of music. We hear something that brings back memories. Something that instantly takes our thoughts back to another time and another place.

It happened to me a few years ago when I walked into my parents' home; and for no reason that I knew at the time, I suddenly had a mental picture, a flashback, of walking into my grandparents' home. A very different home that I'd not been in for nearly 50 years. And then within seconds I realised that a mantle clock was chiming. A clock that just days before had been given to my parents. A clock that had previously belonged to my grandparents. Which had previously sat on a mantle in their home. And even though I did not know that the clock had been given to my parents; and even before I realised that it was chiming, my mind had unconsciously heard the sound of that chime and was instantly taken back to that moment when I had last heard that clock chime; nearly 50 years before, in my grandparents' home. A memory that had been stored somewhere in my mind for nearly half a century: the sound of a clock echoing from a time when I was still a child.

This morning's celebration of the Feast of Pentecost, with all of the bold dramatic images in our Lesson from the Acts of the Apostles, is filled with echoes. Echoes of stories that first unfolded many years long before that day. The first echo that we encounter is an echo of that day when God appeared to Moses on Mount Sinai, giving him the two tables of stone upon which were written the Law; that day when God appeared on the top of the mountain as a devouring fire in the sight of all of the people of Israel; who could do little more than just cower in fear at the foot of the mountain. That image of fire on the top of Mount Sinai is echoed this morning in the cloven tongues of fire that rested upon the heads of the apostolic church; the fire which, in this case, was meant not to fill them with fear but with love. It is, very intentionally, a dramatic re-creation of that previous moment: in this case, the newer Law written on the heart fulfilling and completing the much older Law written on tables of stone.

The second echo that we encounter this morning is an echo of a story from the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel; that story that tells us of a valley filled with dry bones, which, by the power of God, are joined together with a great rattling sound: bone joined to bone, with sinews and flesh and skin, into which God calls the four winds to breathe life: an exceedingly great host called and equipped for the work of God. And that image of a mighty rushing wind is echoed this morning in the sound of the mighty rushing wind that filled the house in which the Apostles were gathered, filling them with the Holy Spirit; God breathing new life and new power into His Church that they might be equipped for the work to which God was calling them.

But the third echo that we find in this morning's celebration is a far older echo. It is an echo from the Book of Genesis; from that passage which tells us of the sad, depressing story of human disobedience and destruction; of our brokenness and alienation: from God, from nature, and from each other; a story which begins in our

banishment from the Garden and reaches its inevitable conclusion in the confusion and division of language following our efforts to scale the heights of heaven ourselves in the building of the Tower of Babel. The story of the tower of Babel stands as one of the preeminent symbols of human disconnectedness: the brokenness of all humanity; our innate inability to speak with clarity and understanding; as well as our innate inability to listen with patience and love. It's the story that takes the individual brokenness of Adam and Eve's Fall and makes it universal; making it the common experience of all humanity: what began with two now infects all of life; and all share in the brokenness of creation.

That, of course, is the story that plays out over and over again in human history as well as in our own lives. That's why this week's Gospel speaks over and over again about love; and about our love for Christ. Because the purpose of this Spirit-filled Church is to heal the brokenness and division of every human heart. That's why we hear that, on the Day of Pentecost, once all the commotion and confusion of wind and flame have settled down, the first sign that something radically new is happening is the power they were given to speak and hear in new tongues; not just a sign of how they were being directed to proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ to all peoples and languages; surely that's true; but also a clear sign that God called and formed and sent out this Spirit-led Church to heal the brokenness and division of language; to heal the curse of the Tower of Babel; the curse, passed on to every generation of humanity, of not being able or not being willing to speak the unifying language of love. And that's why in this week's Gospel Jesus speaks of peace to his disciples before his death; just as he will again just a few days later on the day of his Resurrection; surely peace in our hearts; but just as importantly, peace in every heart; especially those hearts that struggle every day in the face of division and rejection and injustice.

Now, I don't need to tell you about division. I don't need to tell you about the brokenness of this world. We see it every day in the countless ways in which we divide ourselves; the countless ways in which we categorise and dismiss each other, whether politically or culturally or racially or ethnically or economically. Times of great stress serve to accentuate the fault lines that have been there all along; and the fear and uncertainty that we see around us right now only force those cracks even wider.

Which is why it's so incredibly important for us to be the Body of Christ right now; and to make sure that every word we say is a word of unity rather than division; a word of forgiveness rather than rejection. Because it's so easy just to speak that other, broken, divided language; the language that tears apart what God calls us to bring together; the language that sees others not as brothers and sisters but as enemies or opponents; the language that closes rather than opens our hearts and ears; the language that feels threatened by difference. It's so easy to hear that divisive language all around us, to hear it on TV or Facebook; to hear it from family and friends and neighbours; and just assume that it must be ok; that it must be right. I think that it is for times such as these that God has made his Church; that it is for times such as these that God has given to us his Holy Spirit. And it is in such times as we now find ourselves that it is all that more essential that we be the Church; to heal the broken; to draw together the divided. That's what the Day of Pentecost means. That's who we're called to be.