Pentecost (Year B)

'Have you run dry?'

Over the last couple of years, I think that many of us have become far more health conscious. More and more people seem to be opting for a largely plant-based diet both for ethical and health reasons. In parallel, there has been a global resurgence in spirituality as people begin to awaken to the possibility that perhaps there is more to life than what they are currently experiencing. Sadly however, much of this awakening appears to be occurring outside organised religion.

The recent COVID pandemic has forced us to face the very real possibility that we might contract this infectious and potentially life-threatening illness. Prompting many of us to make an extra effort to eat more healthily and boost our overall health and body's immune system. For those of us who are a certain age, illnesses and minor ailments become more prevalent and we are encouraged to have regular health checks as an added precaution. All of this makes me wonder how many of us are taking more interest in our physical wellbeing than spiritual? I have asked this question many times before and I will do so again, when did you last have a spiritual check-up?

For some, us the very real possibility of death has re-focussed our minds, causing us to re-think the meaning of life and perhaps ask if there is a God, what does this mean for me and might I connect with the Divine?

The outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost was a seismic event that occurred within the heart of organised religion at a major Jewish Festival from which Christianity was birthed.

The implications of this momentous occurrence that we celebrate today should not be underestimated. It answers the deep down, spiritual longing of all humanity.

Our Old Testament reading from the prophet Ezekiel describes his vivid vision of the valley of dry bones. It is a prophetic utterance against the house of Israel. In graphic detail he describes the macabre sight of a valley strewn with dry, sun-bleached bones. To the casual observer, these objects would have appeared as lifeless skeletal remains apparently good for nothing. However, speaking through the prophet, God pronounces that these dry bones would be once again brought back to life: "I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live" (37: 5). The prophet was prompted by God to call on him to breath upon them that they may live again. (37:9). God in turn answered, and lo they were resurrected.

The prophesy was in fact a critique of the spiritual and moral state of Israel – dead and lifeless, yet not beyond regeneration.

What about our country and the church in our land, I wonder what is God saying to us about the state of our nation? Are we likewise spiritually arid and by and large lifeless? Do we have faith like Ezekiel that God can breathe new life into us? The answer, is emphatically yes, God can and wants to do just that.

The celebration of Pentecost reminds us of how far we humans have fallen and how much we need the breath of God's Holy Spirit in our lives. For too long, we have listened to the lies of the enemy, that we essentially don't need God, that we can go it alone. In our gospel reading Jesus describes the Holy Spirit as 'the spirit of truth (15: 13, 26). Never has there been a greater need for truth. We are constantly being

fed lies and half-truths, from the media and by politicians. Lies that many of us gullibly believe. That is on top of that little voice, that chatterbox in our heads that relentlessly seeks to sow seeds of doubt. It's no wonder we make wrong decisions.

A poor analogy I know but I like to think of being filled with God's Holy Spirit is as effective as pressing the reset button on an electronic device such as a phone that restores it to the manufacturer's original settings. We were created to live in union with God, Jesus by his life showed that it is possible and promised his disciples that when the promised Holy Spirit came on them, they too would be reborn and experience life in all its fullness (John 10:10). That same Holy Spirit is still available to <u>all</u> believers today, irrespective of age or race as in was the First Century.

St Paul writing to the church in Ephesus encouraged them to 'be filled with the Holy Spirit' (Ephesians 5:18). The Greek word used in this context means not a one-off event but rather a continuous sense of being filled.

So, this Pentecost, if you feel that you have drifted from God and are in need of a fresh infilling of God's Holy Spirit. Do not delay, take action; I promise, you will not regret it!

Rev Andrew Jacobson

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