

Sermon: God's Spirit brings peace
Acts 2.1-12

I am telling you it looked just like little flames above our heads. Honestly, it did. First there was the big wind sound and yes, we've all made jokes about that. But actually, when we were there it was quite scary. Right after the noise, little flames appeared above our heads.

No - my hair did not get burnt. And no, it's not how Peter ended up bald. These flames appeared and then spread around the room above each person. I felt strangely warmed.

We were all together. We'd seen so many strange things but top of the list no 1: Jesus had died and then we saw him again – resurrected from the dead. No 2 Jesus promised us the Holy Spirit and then went into heaven.

We were living in limbo. We were scared to go outside, we kept ourselves to ourselves. Everyone was suspicious of us – and if they thought we'd been with him, there would have been trouble. He'd been named a troublemaker – he'd been crucified with a couple of robbers. We were scared they'd do the same to us, so we stayed indoors. My word it is dull being cooped up isn't it?

Did you know that fire is a sign of God's presence in the scriptures? Oh yes – remember the burning bush with Moses – God's presence calling him to lead our people. then again on Mount Sinai when God gave us the ten commandments – God's presence came down from heaven like fire, a pillar of fire to lead us through the desert when we'd escaped from Egypt.

So, when I saw these little flames. I wondered 'what does this mean?' I thought about what we use fire for. Fire gives us light. There is no other way to see in the dark is there? Candles and oil lamps all need a spark from the fire to start them. And it warms us, fires keep our homes toasty in the winter.

As these flames appeared, they did not burn us, they didn't burn the house down either. They rested on us. It was the lightest touch. A gentle warmth of God's presence, glowing light above our heads helping us to see in the craziest of times. And at that moment I felt God's peace.

The Holy Spirit gives us so many things – but the biggest gift for me is peace. As God's presence rested above me, I found peace within my very soul. a sense of peace that spread from my head to my toes. A gentle warmth that filled my body. God's peace is like that.

It had already started you know – some of the men were arguing about who should be in charge. So, it made me smile that those flames rested on all our heads, men, women, old and young – God's Spirit rested on all of us. This peace is a peace where all of us are recognised as equal in God's sight. No struggle to live, no fear of where to walk, run or play but each of us treated the same, blessed the same.

God's peace enabled me to speak. Not just words I already knew, but words I had no way of knowing – words from other languages, I was telling people about God in languages the crowd understood, and I didn't.

We heard God's Spirit together first, then we spoke. Each of our experiences were valid, each person accepted for who they were – all of us different, but one Spirit. One wind that blew through the house, chasing out every cobweb of inequality that ever existed.

Do not let anyone look down on you
because you are young
Do not let anyone look down on you
because you are a woman
Do not let anyone look down on you
because you are a man
Do not let anyone look down on you
because you are old

Do not let anyone look down on you
because of your race

God's Spirit has anointed all of us who hear
him to speak for him.

And when we apply that same principle to
our own lives, they are transformed too.
When we hear another, we allow them to
speak. When we deliberately create places
and structures that allow others to be heard,
we allow speech and we allow God's Spirit
to speak to its fullest.

If just one nominated person had spoken
that day only the Parthians might have heard
the good news that God loves us that day. If
we all hear God's Spirit, and then all speak –
the multitudes can hear.

It can be hard to hear God speak, it can be
hard to hear, truly hear even a windstorm. It
can be hard to hear if we are distracted by
everyday life – by friends, family, the noise
of the market, animals yapping for attention,
by the needs of others. But if we pray, if we
wait for God's Spirit, if we wait for all that
God has promised, he will speak when we
listen.

If you haven't been heard, if you have found
that your voice is silent, if you feel like
screaming in your family, friendships, in
lockdown – God hears you.

If you are always heard, if you speak a lot at
home, church, on zoom. Have you listened
to others? Have you heard what they might
want to say? If we hear others, we hear God.

We often say – oooh if I could have 5
minutes peace! I think I'd always thought
God's peace was like that, his peace was
quiet or silence. But the peace we received
was different, bigger than quietness. His
peace brought confidence.

The crowd heard me speaking, because of
God's peace. They heard me and they heard
God's good news – Jesus is alive, Jesus is
the saviour of the world. God's presence,

God's peace gave me confidence,
confidence to speak about Jesus. I was heard
into speech. All of us were. God used all of
us to tell the good news about Jesus to so
many people and hey he can do the same for
you too.

The Holy Spirit rested each of us and gave
me such an overwhelming sense of God's
peace and his presence that every worry I
ever had melted away. Whenever I don't
know what to do, whenever I'm seeking
God, whenever I'm at a crossroads in my
life, I ask God again to give me a sense of
his peace. His peace rests on us, his peace is
gentle and warm and brings light.

His peace gives strength and confidence and
helps us tell everyone just how much God
loves us.

I pray his peace rests on you today and at
every Pentecost.