

PENTECOST

Tēnā koutou katoa

Over the years I have used a number of objects in church in an effort to try and give a sense of the celebration of Pentecost. Orange, red, and yellow balloons. A birthday cake for the church. An oscillating fan. These crepe paper strands (pictured) on the end of pews signifying flames. A ping pong ball suspended in the air through the blast of a hair dryer! Trying, inadequately, to point towards something beyond words.

In the *Acts of the Apostles* we hear how the disciples have gathered – they have been told to wait and they do. And they have this experience that has been described as, *like the sound of a rush of wind*, and, *like tongues of fire amongst them*. They have the experience of the power of the Holy Spirit flooding their beings. Those disheartened are renewed - prodded into life and enabled by the Holy Spirit which transforms them again and makes them bold. Jesus' promise to them has been dramatically fulfilled.

The Holy Spirit is the presence of God for all of us, not just for those early disciples. The Holy Spirit is our help, our guidance, our counsel, and our comfort. The way of the Spirit is mysterious and blows where it wills. It is experienced in a variety of ways.

In the scriptures the description of the Holy Spirit is diverse. Sometimes the Spirit is a mighty force that overwhelms the person/s. Sometimes the Spirit appears as an ecstatic kind of speech. And at other times the Spirit is described as the breath of God that gently works in the world. Sometimes it is the still small voice.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer in his prison meditations* spoke of a certain experience that he had of the Holy Spirit:

"I vividly recall that night (of torture)...and how I prayed to God that he might send death to deliver me because of the helplessness and the pain I felt I could no longer endure, and the violence and hatred to which I was no longer equal. How I wrestled with God that night and finally in my great need crept to him, weeping. Not until morning did a great peace come to me, a blissful awareness of light, strength, and warmth, bringing with it the conviction that I must see this thing through and at the same time the blessed assurance that I should see it through. Solace in Woe. This is the work of the Holy Spirit, the Comforter. This is the kind of creative dialogue (the Spirit) conducts with (humankind). These are the secret blessings (the Spirit) dispenses which enable a person to live and endure..."

The resurrection brought hope and new life to the disciples. They were lifted out of the experience and grief of Good Friday and given a sense of a new and profound understanding and experience of the divine. Yet it was Pentecost that energised them, set them on fire. They were empowered and amazing things were made possible.

At times, life in the church can be challenging and we have our disappointments. We seek to live in the ways of Jesus but sometimes we stumble. Our celebration of Pentecost holds out to us the promise of new possibilities. Of being energised and empowered as the Body of Christ. The Holy Spirit stimulates and enables us. Let us hold on to that promise, be open to the work of the Holy Spirit, and seek to serve our God in this time and place.

Rose

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* Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*. New York: Macmillan.