

A prayer of adoration

We praise you, God of all time,
for speaking to us through the tongues of Pentecost,
for stirring our longings with the excitement of Pentecost,
for uniting our communities with the inclusiveness of Pentecost.
Fill our lives, we pray, with the enormity of Pentecost,
until they overflow with compassion and commitment
to care for and celebrate all creation to the glory of your name.

Amen.

A prayer of confession and an Assurance of forgiveness

Forgive us, Creator God,
when we have not heard your voice in the song of the birds and the rustle of
leaves: Open the ears of our hearts.
When we have not seen you in the grandeur of the mountains and the rhythm
of the waves: Open the eyes of our hearts.
When we have not rejoiced at the vibrance of spring or the colours of autumn:
Unlock the joy in our hearts.
When we have stifled your Spirit and confined your love: Deepen the love in
our hearts.
Forgive us, and release in us the true Spirit of Pentecost.
Today and always.

Amen.

Assurance of forgiveness

Gracious God, ignite our prayers
with the life-giving fire of Pentecost,
that we may not fear our inadequacy,
our hesitancy or our doubt,
but bring before you all that we are,
all that we have been, and all that we can be.
May we know that we can never aim high enough,
and never conceive anything complete enough,
to prepare us for all you would bless us with –
individually, as communities and as nations.
Help us to gather together and wait for you afresh,
trusting your love, mercy and forgiveness.

Amen.

Sermon by Rev Peter Lyth

In the years immediately leading up to 2010, there were rumours that the Apple corporation had developed a new kind of computer gizmo. It was referred to as a tablet, although at that stage many people were not clear about exactly what that meant – although tablets had actually been around for some time.

On April 3rd 2010, the iPad was unveiled at a presentation with Steve Jobs, the joint founder of the Apple corporation demonstrating the new device in a huge theatre with adoring Apple users and the technical press on hand. It was televised and press releases went around the globe. The presentation did not spare its audience any drama as Steve (clad in characteristic black polo-neck and sneakers) was backed by huge screens so that no-one was in any doubt as to what he was unveiling. It was a spectacular event that heralded a revolution in computing. There are many who claim not to have a computer but in fact have an iPad, in itself a powerful and competent device that has more computing power than the Home Office mainframe had in the 90's. That presentation sparked a revolution in the way that people looked at computing and now there are all sorts of imitators such as the Samsung Galaxy series and the Microsoft Surface Go. The iPad made computing accessible in a new and profound way and many people can now e-mail, use Zoom and order things off Amazon in a way that would have been unthinkable before.

Going back 2,000 years, an event completely changed the way in which people looked at God. Before then, most people thought that God was specifically a Jewish God. Moreover, the way to salvation was through adherence to the Law, a series of rules that were often even harder to follow than those we had to adhere to at the height of Covid. A small band of followers of Jesus had learned that there was another way – one of relying on God's grace. But up until this moment this was very much a minority group. But suddenly, in a trice – the new movement was kick started. The church as we know it was launched. Jesus' followers did not know what direction events would follow -after all they were reliant on God. What we do know is that they reached a large number of people in a very short period of time. It helped that there were many from the Jewish diaspora present in Jerusalem at that moment, gathered for Pentecost, the "Feast of Weeks" which was a festival of the harvest held 7 weeks after Passover.

It might seem strange to link this with the launch of the iPad. But the two events have more in common than you might think and we can learn a lot from both, not just in how we conduct our faith but how we approach things in the church.

The first thing is that there was a lot of preparation behind the scenes before the event took place. Before the iPad was launched, all sorts of development was required. The technology for the touch screen had to be developed further. Apple had already produced their early phones but this was something much larger. Then there were the processors that would make it work and armies of computer programmers that would write the code so that when you tapped the right picture, something would happen. Then of course, they had to have the manufacturing capability to make enough to supply the demand, the distribution and support that would be required. It was a huge undertaking that needed years of setting up – it did not happen overnight.

We are told that the events of Pentecost did not happen spontaneously, although it's fair to say that the disciples had little idea of how things would transpire. We are told that "They all joined constantly together in prayer, along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus and with his brothers". Jesus had already told them, at the time of his ascension that they would be baptised with the Holy Spirit, but at a time appointed by God. They also would be witnesses – something that I will come to later. When we come to do things in the church, we too need to prepare. It's not just in the material preparations, but more essentially that we are spiritually prepared. In communing with God, we are guided and strengthened by Him.

Secondly, it was an event that was communicated. When Steve Jobs did his presentation, it was relayed across the world. The press was invited. It was televised. Invited guests were able to tell their friends. All of this would be translated into languages across the globe. All this ensured that the maximum number of people would hear and understand the message that there was a new product out there and some indication of what it would do.

Likewise, one of the features that we hear of Pentecost is that the audience could hear and understand the message. "a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard them speaking in his own language". It was not enough for the disciples to speak, they had to be understood by those around. Often this phenomenon gets confused with "speaking in tongues" but really, it was very much about communication. They had a new way of relating

to God and it had to be communicated to the widest possible audience from those who were gathered in Jerusalem. Later, as promised by Jesus, they would carry the message, “in Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth” using the trade routes and that new technology of the time, the Roman Road. All too often the church can talk in its own language that others outside do not understand – we need the spirit of Pentecost once more so that we can spread the message of Jesus.

Finally, it’s worth remembering that this led to change. Nothing was the same again. For the world of computers, the launch of the iPad it meant that there was a new device that many more people could understand. Later people would also use them for taking photos, watching films, ordering groceries, looking up info – the world was the limit.

For the Disciples, the world was also the limit as they were changed from fearful to fearless. Emboldened by the Holy Spirit, the message of Jesus was spread throughout the known world and churches were founded all over the Roman Empire. Pentecost is not about staying the same but being made new. The church also needs to be imbued with the courage to spread the word.

Pentecost was the start of the movement that launched the church. It was supported by prayer as the disciples prepared, it talked the language of those around them so that it could be understood and it was above all a movement for change as the message of Christ was spread. May we too be emboldened by this same Spirit as we emerge from the pandemic and look to the future.

A prayer of praise and thanksgiving

Living God,
thank you for the energy of Pentecost,
for the promises fulfilled,
for the lives changed,
for the hearts touched,
for the power unleashed,
for the overflowing of your Spirit into our world.
In Jesus’ name.

Amen.

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