

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be pleasing in your sight  
O Lord, my rock and my redeemer.

A sound like the wind... tongues as of fire.... How do you describe the indescribable? The Spirit seems to evade description. We are left observing and describing the works of the Spirit, the effect she has where she breathes. Even that is not always an easy task – I am sure that the disciples were pleased to be described as being able to communicate with all the diverse group of people around them, but less thrilled with being shown as seeming to be drunk at 9 in the morning! The Spirit seldom works in the way we expect her to! In his book 'The Shack' WM Young describes the Spirit creating beauty out of complex patterns.



The Spirit says: “A fractal... something considered simple and orderly that is actually composed of repeated patterns no matter how magnified. A fractal is almost infinitely complex. I love fractals, so I put them everywhere.” I first encountered the repeated patterns of nature, not through a David Attenborough nature programme, but in my music degree course. We were studying a piece by Bach, and in her analysis our tutor pointed out that the structure followed certain mathematical patterns. (there are those in our congregation who can explain the maths side much better than I can!)

She mentioned that these same structures, patterns, and ratios are to be found not only in our Bach cantata, but throughout nature, from a Romanesco broccoli, to the milky way, in music from around the world, not just that produced by the largely German, all white, all male group of composers we were studying, global architecture, art, maths, physics, astro physics.... These universal patterns have stuck with me, and I now look out for them in art galleries, walking around cities, and in the garden. Yesterday I noticed that my cornflower heads are all in the same pattern. It seems to me that The Spirit breathes through all of creation – inviting us to a place beauty, unity and a passion to join her in the act of creating something beyond ourselves.

Let's park that universal thought and go to a more domestic setting – last week you might remember it was rather blustery. On one very windy day the trees across the road from our house were bent almost double with the strength of the gusts. Chris was working at the kitchen table – the sight was so extraordinary I said “stop that a second, come outside and look at the wind” I realized how silly that sounded, you can't see the wind, we could see the trees, bent by the force of the wind, but not the wind itself. This

is the dilemma facing Luke writing in acts – he is wanting to say to the readers – come and look at the Spirit, but whatever happened in that room where the disciples were waiting – processing the events of the previous weeks and working out what their ‘new normal’ would be – was so strange that he had to use images, similes – a sound like the wind, tongues, as of fire.

What we can really see is the effect of the breath of the Spirit on the disciples. They were suddenly able to be understood by everyone. There are echoes here to the story of the tower of Babel. According to that story there was once a time when all people on the earth spoke the same language and could understand everyone else. They became technologically advanced, inventing strong bricks which could build high towers. Instead of using this unity to do good in the world they set about building tower, tall enough to reach to God seeking to make a name for themselves. To stop this happening again God gave them many languages and scattered them across the world. The Spirit of Pentecost undid this action, temporarily letting everyone understand each other. The disciples use this gift to preach the good news of Jesus to those who were listening. At the end of the day about 3,000 believed and were baptized.

Like those primitive people becoming technologically advanced with their bricks, we are living in an age of great technological advancement. That technology has been a great blessing at this moment in time, allowing families to reconnect, including this, our church family. As we look at the faces in the little squares on our screens, we know that, although we are physically distant, we are connected by the same spirit. Many congregations are also realizing that by meeting digitally there are some who are able to access their services who have been excluded from in person worship, either by buildings which are hard to access, or lack of transportation. I am finding starting the day with morning prayer with others to be very life giving. Although our technology is open to temptations of misuse, in the current situation it has been a way for the Spirit to work through forging connections, bringing people together, and allowing creativity to continue while we are apart.

On this day of Pentecost (referred to as the birthday of the church) we celebrate the Spirit breathing on the disciples at a particular time, place and location. However, the Spirit did not just appear at Pentecost, she had been around from the beginning. As God breathed creation into being, there is the Spirit, hovering over the waters. The story of Gods interactions with Gods people is not a straight line from A-B story, but a complex fractal where we catch glimpses of the Spirit at work in every twist and turn. These disciples, waiting in their room had thought their relationship with God would be a straight line – worship God, God sends the Messiah to over throw Caesar – God’s people regain their promised land (to grossly over simplify) But God’s act of redemption, the death resurrection and ascension of Gods own Son, was far more complex, counter intuitive and I would imagine, for the disciples, confusing to live through.

So it is with our own lives. We might think our lives should follow a straight-line pattern, school, university or apprenticeship, work, maybe marriage and children. Sometimes that can be how life works out, but we know in reality that even if we do follow that pattern, each of those areas has its own little wobbles, own challenges to be overcome, changes in direction, changes in path, which makes something much more complex, and although possibly seeming messy at the time, more beautiful than a straight line. Globally, beyond our own lives, as we join in the Spirit's work of making justice flow like a river we want to see straight lines – an injustice happens, we campaign and join in the protest, surely then governments act justly, frustratingly it doesn't work like that, and so often we are left asking with the psalmist, how long o Lord?

Returning to our own individual stories, as with many things in life it is only when we look back that we can see the beauty and the patterns in what felt like chaos at the time. We are currently all going through a covid 19 wobble in our stories. For some of us it will be a time of re-grouping, and reassessing, working out what is important, or not... for others it will be a time of great loss and sadness, for most it will be some combination of the two. When we look back we will see how this time added to the whole beautiful picture of our life, but for now, like the disciples in their waiting, we have to experience it for what it is – a wobble in which we very much need the beauty, unity and creative passion, breathed by the Spirit.

One way to stay 'tuned in' to the Spirit is by prayer. Former Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams once described prayer as being like sunbathing: "When you're lying on the beach something is happening, something that has nothing to do with how you feel or how hard you're trying. You're not going to get a better tan by screwing up your eyes and concentrating. You give the time, and that's it. All you have to do is turn up. And then things change, at their own pace. You simply have to be there where the light can get at you."

So it is with the Spirit. We cannot make the Spirit turn up – she is already there, like the sun, when we are attentive we can notice where and how she acts. Her actions are not exclusive, they are for anyone who is thirsty (I think that's all of us), and her actions are not just for us, but so that rivers of living water can flow from us to others, as we join together in the Spirit's ongoing work of beauty, unity and creativity. Know that wherever you are in your story, looking back over a completed work of beauty or in the midst of creative mess, the Spirit is there with you, breathing life, energy and a beautiful coherence. God is always at work through the Spirit so that we can grow to learn to trust that there is a beautiful coherence that God sees, even in those times that we can't.