**SUNDAY JUNE 5, 2022 - PENTECOST**

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be acceptable to you O Lord, my rock and my redeemer.

It is Pentecost today, a time to rejoice indeed, at the visible arrival of the Holy Spirit. Whitsun today, tomorrow is Whit Monday, and a day off in many countries around the world, the U.K., much of the Commonwealth, and a good part of Europe, much of the Christian world in fact. And I would like to know why we shouldn’t have a long weekend here too!

What I’m getting at is that Pentecost is a big deal. Pentecost is the Greek word for Shavuot, which was and is an important Jewish festival, originally about bringing in the first fruits of the wheat harvest, but early linked to the giving of the Torah, the five books of the Law, given to Moses. Nowadays trees are planted in its honour. We won’t get involved in a long discussion of how much of the Law was given to Moses, seeing that the Torah discusses his death.

So, picture to yourselves the situation in Jerusalem that day in Jerusalem one thousand nine hundred and eighty-nine years ago. It’s pilgrim season in Roman-occupied Jerusalem. Devout Jews from the Diaspora spread around the Mediterranean Roman empire wished to see Jerusalem at least once in their lives, just as Muslims wish to see Mecca once in their lifetime, or many Christians want to see the Holy Land. Travel was expensive and dangerous in those days, so if it was possible to share in both Passover and Shavuot, only fifty days apart, why not? So Jerusalem is heaving with pilgrims, Pontius Pilate and his troops are calming down somewhat after the events they saw as a near insurrection compounded by both an eclipse and an earthquake on the day of the Crucifixion. And Peter who is emerging as the leader of the band of Jesus’ followers, has experienced with them some of the most awesome things it is possible to go through. Jesus, whom they followed around the Galilee, and witnessed all the miracles and the teachings, the most precious Prince of Peace has turned out not to be the military leader like the man who became King David that they thought Isaiah had forecast, but something much more important, the Saviour of souls for all human beings, Jew and gentile alike. Remember the fear and sorrow they felt over Good Friday and Holy Saturday, and the elation of the Resurrection. And then seeing Jesus in the flesh several times before the Ascension into Heaven, only a few days previously. So it is no surprise to think that Peter and company have had an awful lot to absorb over the last few weeks.

We also have to remember that Peter and the Apostles and Jesus’ family members and the other close followers were all, like Jesus, convinced and passionate Jews, who had been given truths by Jesus that were as momentous as the giving of the Law to Moses on Mount Sinai. The biggest of very big deals.

Everyone knows that I talk about the Holy Spirit frequently. John’s gospel has a lot to say about the Spirit, the Advocate, the Comforter, the Paraclete, the Advisor, the third member of the Trinity with God the Father and Jesus the Son of God.

Today, 1989 years ago, the Holy Spirit for the first time dramatically reveals itself to people outside of Jesus’ immediate group of followers. And what a reveal! A high wind of tempest force - and we remember that spirit and air and breath have been linked ever since God breathed life into Adam’s nostrils in the Garden of

Eden - and “divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them”. And not merely that spectacular example of the Spirit resting upon this handful of human beings, but they also began to speak in tongues. In general, I think that glossolalia, as speaking in tongues is now called, is a rare phenomenon, and most of what is called glossolalia nowadays is just hysteria, but in this case I think the company assembled was witnessing a genuine miracle. Naturally, the cynics in the crowd said that Peter and company were all drunk, and Peter had to point out that so many drunkards at 9:00am was really not a likely thing. And it is interesting to see that although everyone present was Jewish, yet they came from far distant parts of the Roman Empire, and spoke languages which were Gentile in origin. And if our modern language of English had existed back then, they would have heard the message of the Spirit in English too. Peter goes on to quote a magnificent passage from the prophet Joel about the Last Days. All the early Christians seemed to think that the last days were about to happen, but that’s a subject for another sermon.

My point today is to say that today, for the first time, we see Peter and the apostles are beginning to spread the word abroad, to Jew and non-Jew alike, about the magnificent present Jesus has given us, about the salvation of our souls and prospects of eternal life. I say that’s worth a holiday weekend!

And how are we supposed to take this message? As usual, we are called upon to continue to spread the word of God by living a Christian life, feeding the hungry, tending the sick, helping refugees and other strangers.

Even if we can’t see with our frail and cynical human eyes the tongues of flame resting on each one of us, be sure that they are there. Because the Holy Spirit belongs to each of us. On our side at all times and places, we need only look truthfully into our hearts to perceive it there.

Amen