

Well, here we are on this fine summer morning to celebrate Pentecost; one of the 5 big feasts of the church year. The other big feasts in the year have, for us, more naturally accrued means of celebration- All Saints/ All Souls gets big music, big flowers, and our list of those we love but see no longer. Epiphany has twelfth night, a big family brunch here- 3 kings, king cake. Of course, Christmas and Easter are piled high with music and liturgy and cultural observance.

But Pentecost eludes us a bit. It has become a custom for Episcopalians to refer to this feast as “the birthday of the church.” Jesus is gone and so now it’s up to us. The Holy Spirit was definitively given to the disciples at Pentecost and so now belongs to the church forever through their lineage; the story justifies our mission and authority.

But if we’re honest, this doesn’t hold up to scrutiny, does it. Because we don’t think or teach that Jesus is gone- we assert his endless presence. And we don’t really think or teach that the kingdom is in our hands- we see our shortcomings and we take refuge in Jesus as our hope. Furthermore, the miraculous, momentous and completely ephemeral appearance of the Spirit in the public square does not signal a commission or grant reliable authority to

anyone. It is an untamed instant of revelation that happens outside of religion as we know it.

I think this is why we (certainly as Anglicans) find Pentecost somewhat impenetrable. It describes a moment that does not make easy linear sense and does not offer comfortable affirmation.

Let's review the story- what are the elements? The disciples are gathered- there is loud sound, a sound loud enough to draw a crowd. So there's a crowd. There's fire, but not the sort of spiritual fire we are used to- fire inside of us, fire of love, fire that illuminates. This Pentecost fire is more like, pyrotechnics- a fire that is there and then gone, that behaves strangely: hovering, suspended- is it over everyone's individual head? The crowd too? Every disciple? Just the apostles? OK, so we have a loud sound, we have visual temporary fire, we have disciples leading, convening, with their sharing their message, and we have a crowd who is very diverse, who is into it- they're from all over and they are amazed and they are hearing about God in their own languages. We also have scoffers- people who see the gathering but for some reason cannot enter it, and try to reduce it. "They must be drunk."

This scoffing is essential- our clue to the real atmosphere. That this event could be read as collective intoxication suggests that this event is out of control- wild, ecstatic. Breaking the rules, seeming inappropriate, chaotic and improper.

This is clearly at odds with Anglican ecclesial piety. This kind of event does not promote, lead to, or even speak of good values or sustainable community or repeated liturgical pattern of prayer or fine architecture, nice suits with bowties, and brunch afterwards.

We have here a fleeting moment of collective ecstasy marked by multiple languages and a diverse crowd, loud sound, pyrotechnics and the deep sense of the power of God as Spirit happening outside synagogue or temple (or church) led by people who have no religious authority or credential.

Funny but I was part of just such an experience a few weeks ago. I was with 50,000 people, an incredibly diverse crowd in terms of ethnicity and age and language drawn together by thrillingly loud sound, unparalleled pyrotechnic arts, and leaders with no religious credential whatsoever sharing a message of love as the means of resistance to darkness and the source of strength in

various languages that we all could understand. It was a shockingly sober crowd, who became intoxicated together on the beauty of the shared energy of love. It was also a moment that can be scoffed and sneered at. Yes, you guessed it, I am talking about my beloved Korean supergroup BTS and their world tour concert called Love Yourself/ Speak Yourself.

At the end of the concert, the group leader Kim Namjoon spoke to the assembled crowd. He called our attention to the intensity and preciousness and reality of the moment we shared. His message was then sung by the group in the lyrics of their final song, 'Mikrokosmos':

Inside those pitch black nights

The lights we saw in each other

Were saying the same thing

...people are light

...people are stars

In this place full of where

People are lights                      We're shining

Starlight that shines brighter in the darkest night

The deeper the night, the brighter the starlight.

I breathe while looking at you

Inside those pitch black nights

Shine, dream, smile

Oh let us light up the night

shine in our own ways

Isn't that Jesus' commission to us in John? You are the light- the light is in you. I am light, you are light, and no matter how dark the night, the light will not be quenched. That is the source of the deep peace Jesus offers. Isn't that the commission of Pentecost? Let us light up the night. Let us see light in one another, in this place where people are full of light. The story is ours- each and together, and that shared light is what we know of the power of God.

The fact that the BTS concert feels like the Pentecost story is a reminder that the Holy Spirit is not bound by religion. She can show up wherever she wants. She is not owned by the church. She might not even be best understood in church. She is not defined by a linear agenda. She does not care to affirm social propriety. The Holy Spirit is likely to be found in an unexpected instant, in collective ecstasy. If we truly wished to claim being commissioned, ruled, led, directed by the Holy Spirit, what would that mean for us? It would mean we have to resist the temptation to value linear progress, measurable goals,

achievable growth, and social propriety. Those values, fine though they may be, are not the charisms of the Holy Spirit we discover in today's story.

How shall we take this into our lives? We must look for the Spirit, wait for it, cultivate the willingness to be astonished by it. We must be ready to surrender to surprising collective experiences of love. Pentecost is a story that can easily be scoffed at- missed, and dismissed. Am I willing to put my trust in fleeting moments of ecstatic knowledge?

To those being baptized, to all of us renewing those vows, may we have the grace to trust the power of the Spirit in the message of Pentecost. May we have many experiences of seeing the light in one another and surrendering to the power of unexpected love. May we be renewed; Come Holy Spirit!