

Sunday School Notes: 22 May 2022: Pentecost (Acts 2)

The story of Jesus going back into heaven is told briefly in the middle of a chapter and in just 3 verses. Yet his departure must have been devastating for his disciples. They had spent every moment with him for about 3 years; they were used to discussing everything with him and to getting his advice about everything. And now he was gone! They were alone!

But he had given them one last piece of advice: Go and wait in Jerusalem. I am sure they would rather have gone back to Galilee – to their home territory, but they did what Jesus asked, perhaps thinking this was the last thing they would ever be able to do for him. There were about 120 of them. I wonder who it was who realized that they could still talk to Jesus. We don't know, but we do read that every day they prayed together. I wonder how their prayers went. Perhaps they said "Jesus, why are we here? What's going to happen to us now? How are we going to manage without you. Life is hard – the Romans and the Jews hate us."

They were still in Jerusalem when it was time to celebrate Pentecost. In Exodus God had instructed his people to celebrate the harvest. All the men were expected to travel to Jerusalem then, and so this group probably joined in the general prayers. Why not! They were there anyway!

Just as at Passover/Easter, Jerusalem was full of pilgrims. Jesus' friends didn't know it, but it was the perfect time for God to speak and show the next stage of his plan.

And God did!

Imagine the scene: people were walking along the road peacefully when suddenly there was the sound of a roaring gust of wind. People grabbed onto their hats and coats to hold them tight – but then realized that there was no actual wind. Weird!

Then, woken up by the sound, the people would have seen a building blazing with fire. People were pouring out of their houses to watch it. But then the crowd realized that there was no smell of burning. (Centuries before Moses had been called into God's service through a flaming bush which didn't burn! You probably remember the story – and the Jews

of Jesus' day certainly did.) This time, however, God did not appear in a bush but in tongues of fire in a building. Weirder and weirder!

At that moment the inhabitants of the house came out – not in a panic because of fire, but chattering excitedly among themselves. When the crowd strained their ears to hear what they were saying, they discovered that they were talking different languages. Every stranger in Jerusalem could hear the discussion in his/her own language. How weird is that!

The crowd was ready to hear God's message and, as Jesus' followers relayed it, they could hear the message he planned for them. As Peter – once the cowardly fisherman – stepped forward to speak he realised, although he had seldom spoken in public before, that he had a new braveness. It wasn't the old Peter speaking, but God's new man. He saw things in Scripture that he hadn't noticed before. He recognized that what was happening was the fulfilment of God's promise through the prophet, Joel. With the newly-received power of the Holy Spirit, he explained that the folk in the house were followers of Jesus Christ who had risen from the dead. He accused the crowd of onlookers of having dared to condemn God's own Son to death.

The crowd was horrified at the thought. Many of them wept and asked what they could do to make up. Peter explained that God loved them so much he was willing to forgive them even that. The display of power resulted in over 3000 people deciding that Jesus really was God's Son and beginning to live their lives as Christian people, praying and worshipping God the Father and God the Son.

So God's display of power had
Turned ordinary scared disciples into brave followers and preachers;
Turned curious onlookers into committed followers;and
Kick-started the church.

It also reminds us all these years later that God did not leave us stranded when Jesus went back to heaven, but that his power is available to us through the Holy Spirit who will be our Friend and Comforter and who will cheer and guide us if we ask him to. Good news!