

**'We whom the Spirit lights,  
give light to the world'**

**Sermon for Pentecost Sunday by Mark Pilgrim**

Acts 2.1-21 and John 20.19-23

Glimmer, gleam, glint...  
glitter, glow, glare...  
glistening, glossy, glance...

cool, neutral, warm...

radiant, bright, blinding

luminous, inviting, spangling...

Eighteen words with one connection: which is....?

That they all describe or are associated with light and looking. And there's something particularly special about the first nine. Can you see that they all begin with one unusual letter combination? 'Gl'. Why is that? Perhaps some of you could research this, this week, and let me know!

What I want to focus on today, though, is this: Pentecost Sunday celebrates the Holy Spirit falling not only on Jesus' first disciples but also on all those since who commit themselves to Christ, equipping and empowering Jesus' followers, past and present, to unveil God's kingdom through every aspect of life. And that Spirit, the Holy Spirit, is active and just as present and powerful today, among us, as it was 2000 years ago. So: how can we encourage and enable the activity of the Spirit to have maximum impact and room to flourish in a pandemic influenced world today?

At the end of this and many Communion services we say a prayer full of rich images. It begins with a subtle reference to the Parable of the Prodigal Son: 'Father of all, we give you thanks and praise that, when we were far off, you met us in Your Son and brought us home.' It associates the Last Supper and Jesus' Passion poetically with resurrection and joy 'May we who share Christ's body live his risen life, we who drink his cup bring life to others.' And then it asks that 'we whom the Spirit lights' might 'give light to the world'.

What strikes me this Pentecost Sunday is that the light of the Holy Spirit is being reflected and refracted by God's people today in a myriad of different ways. And we should rejoice and encourage each other in this myriad refraction.

This week's Weekly Leaflet has sections about our Rainbow Prayer initiative and one which encourages everyone to keep St Peter's 'vibrantly visible'.

Here's a photo of the Prayer Rainbow which some of you have created over the last 10 days – thank you!

And this week's fresh invitation is to chalk the path around the church with pictures of celebration. These pictures will be seen and enjoyed by passers-by and visitors, I can guarantee! With play grounds closed, a number of young families are taking the opportunity to teach their children to ride bikes in the church car park – and they are exploring the church grounds and garden as they do so...so your chalked pictures of celebration will definitely brighten someone's day!



Interestingly, not all the responses to our moves towards increased visibility in the community have been entirely positive. A Prayer Walk poster, placed with permission at one location, seems to have been objected to and removed by a stranger not once but twice. And two A3 posters I put up on the public railing outside Tenovus, on the corner of Henleaze Road and Henley Grove, were removed by someone within 24 hours – when I have never known a poster for Party in the Park or our Ale and Arty Festival been removed from there before. So, clearly, what we are doing is being seen and noticed...even if the reaction to it is negative and not what we might hope for. It's still having an impact!

So now let's have a think about ourselves. How are we reflecting and refracting the light of God, placed in and around us by the Holy Spirit? What kind of light are we aiming to emit – and how are other people perceiving and seeing the light of the Spirit in us as we go about our lives?

It's tempting to think, perhaps, that the best light for Christians and Christian faith both to emit and to be seen in is something along the lines of 'warm and welcoming'. And frequently this is true. As a default setting for communicating and recommending Christian faith, 'warm and welcoming' can be not only advisable but essential. Research shows that visitors make up their minds about a church very quickly – first impressions really do count: so the way and the warmth with which we start off is vital to consider.

But different situations require different forms of management and presentation. Not everything can or should be kept 'warm, fuzzy and consensual'. It's no good, in a dangerous situation, deciding what to do by a vote from all those present. Such situations need clear, expert and incisive leadership - as any practitioner in a medical emergency will tell you. In the same way the light of God, the light of the Spirit, that we look to guide us or even that we might be seen to emit could be perceived appropriately by others more as a glare than a glow... more glistening than glimmering...more as a concentrated and sharp, potentially dangerous, beam of laser light rather than the soft glow of candle light. Hence the yellow and grey tones of our 'Where is God in a Coronavirus world?' posters and book publicity offer a growing element over time, I suggest, of challenge. The effectiveness of taking to the streets in this way will only become apparent when we have after the last of our Zoom sessions on the issues raised by the book on Thursday evening of next week. Please pray that the response to our visible publicity – in the books themselves, via the posters on the railings and via our website and Facebook pages – will be constructive and enable God's kingdom to be unveiled a little more fully as a result.

Our own handling of the light of God's Spirit will vary over time. Sometimes we are conscious of the light of faith glowing brightly within us – and sometimes that light is down to a weak glimmer. Sometimes other people will see our practice of Christian faith as an attractive glitter, inviting them to discover more about this light for themselves. Sometimes other people will see our practice of Christian faith as a lighthouse beam – ranging out over the world and shedding light - even if momentarily – on what ought to be done fairly, with greater attention to generosity and justice. All these associations between light and Christian faith can be appropriate and helpful. It all depends on the context.

So: what is your context? Where are you today – where are you going to be this coming week? Our reading from the Acts of the Apostles pictures Jesus' disciples first huddled fearfully in their own little group before being strengthened and empowered by the Spirit to share the light of the Risen Christ. And, similarly, the Gospel of St John pictures those first disciples on the day of the Resurrection being empowered by the Spirit to move from quailing to confidence. Which of those words associated with light – today I invite you to associate them with the Spirit's light – will you communicate and convey to others? Which will you convey – and which do you want to convey?

Glimmer, gleam, glint... glistening, glossy, glance...glitter, glow, glare... radiant, bright, blinding...luminous, inviting, spangling...cool, neutral, warm...

Whatever our choice, let us hand everything over to God and pray with particular commitment now and during the post communion prayer at the end of the service: 'Father of all...may we whom the Spirit lights, give light to the world.' Amen.