

**Pentecost Sunday & Aldersgate Sunday
23rd May, 2021**

The Spirit: testimony and truth; on behalf of Christ.
Based on John 15: 26-27; 16: 4b-15
Rev Peter Cornick: Hinde Street Methodist Church

Since I last stood here, the world – life – has changed beyond our imagination, so it is a great joy to be with you on this Pentecost Sunday – in person! – as well as virtually to those watching from home. I bring you the good wishes of your friends from Hinde Street Methodist Church.

When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own, but will speak whatever he hears, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. John 16:13

On the eve of the first lockdown, Seymour Place, the West London Mission's, (WLM's), project working with rough sleepers, was operating as a night centre. The project had evolved over the previous two years – for many years, it was a day centre, but more recently, circumstances had led us to change it to a night centre. COVID-19 changed all that again – no more communal gathering. During the most recent lockdown, Seymour Place worked with a local provider of hotel studio rooms. We were able to provide accommodation and ongoing support for people who were either working or ready to work.

Alongside that offer of accommodation or work, was an offer of 'coaching'. The coaching comes with staff we employ in association with the Mayday Trust. The coaching looks first, at the people; their gifts; their assets – rather than looking at their situation; being homeless - workless. The coaching attempts not to label someone as a problem needing fixing, but someone with opportunities to discover. The coaching allows the individual to be supported into the next stage of their journey; from a situation of sleeping, perhaps on the street or on floors, and into work and a home. Some of the people Seymour Place supported this last winter, said they felt a greater sense of 'dignity' and 'safety' as a result.

I tell you this because on Pentecost Sunday, the Spirit, according to Saint John, encourages us to provide testimony; provide truth; on behalf of Christ (15:26). This is a story, not of what I do, but of what the professional staff WLM employs have done. It is a testimony to the people who – for various reasons – might have found themselves homeless, but have discovered with guidance or mentoring or coaching, the resources to live – in their own words – with more 'dignity' and 'safety'.

It is testimony and truth on behalf of Christ.

This is a story of Pentecost, a story of the working of the Spirit – not fifteen minutes' walk from here.

On the day of Pentecost, Luke, in Acts, tells us that the apostles were together in one place.

And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them. Acts 2:2-3

Jesus, according to Saint John, is giving his disciples advanced notice of the day of Pentecost, which Luke so vividly describes.

But now I am going to him who sent me. John 16:5

It is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Advocate will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you. John 16:7

When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth. John 16:13

My story of the evolving work of Seymour Place, describes 'mission' – the work of God amongst people who are vulnerable – who seek change. It is an expression of Christ's sacrificial love; an expression of the church's desire to follow Christ.

It is a modern-day movement of the Spirit.

Remember, the disciples were in a room, only fifty days after the extraordinary events of Easter. If they were confused, they had every right to be. And the Spirit came upon them, as forcefully as a violent wind – as intensely as a fire. They were stirred up, and your recall, sent out to proclaim Christ to all nations. Rough Galileans became fluent translators of the good news.

Whatever you think Luke was describing in his wind and fire, the disciples were clearly, propelled into something new – there was no dwelling on memories of Jesus – whether the terrible death or the joyous life. They were changed by the Spirit, in order to testify to his death and resurrection, on Christ's behalf.

We should not be surprised then, if our 'mission' work changes – evolves – if we are receptive to the Spirit, its refining fire; its stirring wind. The nature of the work at Seymour Place changed pre-pandemic; changed during-pandemic; will change post-pandemic. And yet people *are* 'surprised' – we don't see a queue of people outside your building now, they say – do you still help homeless people? Yes, we do – but differently. The movement of the Spirit. Testimony and truth, on his behalf.

But there is another way in which my story of the changing nature of work with homeless people, reflects Pentecost – reflects the coming of the Spirit.

I mentioned the coaches – the mentors – the advocates. Those who are alongside someone in their search for a job; a home. The coaches help people to identify their own gifts or assets; work with them to build confidence – resilience – guide them through the maze of the benefits system; the on-line job searches.

I've recently done a similar thing myself with my son; encouraging the search for work, the search for a flat – all on-line – building confidence; resilience; a mentor or guide to help him discover his own abilities.

A coach – a mentor – a guide – an advocate. Does this sound similar to the Spirit of whom Jesus speaks?

It is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Advocate will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you. John 16:7

The disciples – we – are promised by Jesus, that when he goes, he will return. He will send the Advocate – the Spirit. And they will be given the means of communicating the truth about the Gospel – in many tongues. With the Spirit will come the means to testify – you are witnesses to these things. They will be given wind in their sails; or like the Anglican clergyman, beloved by Methodists, John Wesley, on this Aldersgate Sunday, they will have hearts ‘strangely warmed’ – filled with the fire of the Spirit.

Charles Wesley wrote:

O Thou who camest from above,
the pure celestial fire to impart ...

Jesus, confirm my heart's desire
to work and speak and think for thee;
still let me guard the holy fire,
and still stir up thy gift in me.

When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own, but will speak whatever he hears, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. John 16:13