

I'm pleased to say that after several years of looking, I have now seen a green flash. It happened a couple of months ago. I'd almost given up. I have to say, and I know I'm going to get some pushback on this, but I was actually a bit underwhelmed after all that time. And I think that green flash is the wrong word. That conjures up images of drama that weren't there for me.

But anyway, I've seen a green flash, but I still haven't seen a whale. And I've spent a long time, I'd love to see a whale, because we don't get whales where I'm from. I looked all winter, I saw that picture in the La Jolla Light, I don't know if you saw it, of that huge whale breaching just 100 yards off the coast, just down here behind us, opposite Casa de Manana. And that's where I take my strolls every day, but I look all the time, I've never seen it.

I did wonder when I was down there recently what's the difference between whale watching and simply looking out to sea, because that seems to be all that I ever manage. If I was back home in England sitting on Brighton Beach, could I be whale watching there? Then I realized the answer to that question is no, because there are no whales in the English Channel, whereas they are present here. Even if I can't see them, I know that there are enormous numbers of whales going up and down the coast just off here.

So it is with God, we might not always be aware of God, we can't see him, but we're on the lookout, because we know he's present in the world. And that's the significance of this story from Acts of Pentecost. God comes to be present with his people. That was what was initiated. That first Pentecost is what we celebrate today. And there are two things I want to say about this story. The first is that, at Pentecost, a promise was fulfilled. The promise that's fulfilled here is that God will be present with his people.

When Peter gets up to explain what's happening with the disciples speaking in all these foreign tongues, he says, "We're not drunk. This is what was prophesied in the Old Testament Book of Joel." He quotes from that book, this is what was spoken through the prophets, "In the last days," God declares, "I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh." And Peter's point is, this is that day. That promise has been fulfilled.

And we see there's a promise too in our Gospel reading that's fulfilled in the story of Pentecost. Jesus is

speaking here with his disciples the night before he dies. He knows they're fearful. He comforts them by saying, "The Father is sending you an advocate, the Holy Spirit, who will be with you forever. The Spirit," Jesus says, "will abide with you." In other words, "I'll be present with you by my spirit," Jesus says. That's the promise fulfilled at Pentecost, the coming of the Spirit was God coming to dwell, to abide with his people.

St. Paul picks up this theme. In fact, his Epistles are full of this theme. And I want to quote a verse that's come up in several times in different contexts in recent weeks, from the book of Ephesians. St Paul writes this: "I pray that, according to the riches of his glory, God may grant that you may be strengthened in your inner being with power through his spirit, and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love." That's an amazing thought, that since Pentecost, the spirit of God dwells in our hearts, in the hearts of all his people. He's present deep in our inner being.

But how many of us live our lives conscious of that amazing reality? Do we notice, do we live our lives conscious that God is present with us? There was a noted botanist from New Zealand who was in the mountains looking for a particular type of orchid. She'd looked for three weeks without any success. She was disconsolate. At the end of her last morning, she sat down for a picnic, ate her sandwiches, feeling sorry for herself. As she got up to clear away, she realized that she'd spent the entire picnic sitting on the very orchid for which she was looking.

If we're to notice the God who is close by, the God who is present with us, we need to slow down, be still, sit in silence. That's a great discipline. Let's seek to be attentive to the God who, by his spirit, dwells within us. And before moving on, let me just say in passing that the Holy Spirit, we're told in that reading, comes as a gift. See what Jesus says here: "The Father will give you another advocate." So the Holy Spirit is not passed out as a reward for sort of first division Christians. It's a gift to all God's people that we're to accept. This is our inheritance as Christians, that the God we turn to in Jesus Christ comes to us and dwells with us as a gift.

So Pentecost is a promise fulfilled. It's also about a people transformed. The story in Acts begins with the disciples gathered together in one place, behind closed doors, fearful. They'd seen their leader executed. They

were in hiding. And no doubt they'd be rather confused. They'd witnessed Jesus' resurrection, but weren't sure what to do next. If you were here last week, you'll remember they weren't given a time scale. They were just told to wait. They were in the gap. They'd kept themselves to themselves largely out of timidity and fear.

That all changed at Pentecost. The Spirit comes on them like the rushing of a violent wind. What looked like tongues of flame rested on them. They rushed out, and those disciples who'd been timid began to speak boldly as they addressed the crowd that was gathering outside their door. The people were amazed that they spoke in other languages. But the real miracle is that they were speaking at all. Up to this point, they'd not seen fit to tell anyone about Jesus. This is Peter speaking, who just a few days before had denied even knowing Jesus. And here he was boldly proclaiming in front of a bunch of strangers that Jesus was Lord.

I read in the paper about a man in Britain called Chris Andrews who was one of those disastrous DIY people. Do you say DIY over here, do it yourself? Or DIY in my house, do yourself in. And this Chris Andrews made the paper because he was just a disastrous handyman. And the article cataloged various instances increasing in severity, and he did start to learn his lesson from his various accidents, and he became more safety-conscious. And so, when he decided to put some speakers on the wall, he did remember first of all to turn off the electricity. Then, unable to understand why his electric drill didn't work, he took it apart, found no fault, then tried to put it back together again, but couldn't. So he went out to the equivalent of Home Base to buy a new drill. That, too, didn't work. And so, he was about to take that back when his wife came home and reminded him that he'd turned off the electricity, which is why nothing worked.

And what happened at Pentecost is the electricity being turned on, that power supply suddenly surging into the life of the disciples, the believers, and the nascent church that was formed. The power supply was turned on, and they were transformed. And that power, the power of the Holy Spirit that had such an effect on the disciples, that transformed them from timid people behind doors to those boldly proclaiming that Jesus was Lord, that power is available to all God's people. Let's not try and fiddle around like Chris Andrews under our own steam, trying to work things out for ourselves with

the power supply turned off. We're called to be transformed by the power of God's spirit.

And let me quote St. Paul again: "And all of us with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another, for this comes from the Lord, the Spirit." We are being transformed by the action of God's spirit. You hear a lot these days about self-improvement, a lot of people recently, in various religious traditions, who said, "Well, at the end of the day, what we're trying to do is improve ourselves." Yeah, and in a way, that's a noble aim. But that's not the aim of us in the church. We don't seek self-improvement. We seek to be transformed by the in-dwelling of God's Holy Spirit. Our refinement doesn't come as we pay more and more attention to ourselves, it's as we open ourselves up to the spirit of God who abides with us, who dwells with us. It's as we pay attention to his work inside us that we become more of the people that we were created to be.

And let me close by saying that Pentecost is not about the past. We're not simply today remembering an ancient story. We're celebrating that, and also a wonderful present reality. It's not just about how the first disciples were transformed, it's about us, how we as individuals, as a church community, a body of believers, can be transformed. And I hope that all those who consider themselves members of the church will stay not just for coffee in the hall afterwards, but for a congregational meeting that we're having. And that will be an occasion for us to look forward together to our future, and we remember that that future, that vision, is not about what we can achieve and accomplish under our own steam. The question is, what can we do if we draw on that power supply of God's Holy Spirit to be amongst us, to transform us, to do his wonderful work?

So two things we've seen about Pentecost, the promise of God's presence is fulfilled, and the people are transformed. And as we celebrate this great feast day, let's be aware that these two things are still true for us. We, too, can know God's presence in our lives. And we, too, can be a people transformed.

Amen.