

Now speaking in the name of God, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

I have given up looking for the green flash. I've decided it wasn't good for my eyes and I never saw it anyway. The last straw was when I was standing next to someone at sunset, looking at the sun disappear over the horizon. It just dropped over the horizon. The person standing next to me said, oh there it was. I saw nothing. But I have given up looking for whales. The other week, several people told me that they'd seen whales very close to the shore and there was a photograph you might have seen in the newspaper of a whale a hundred yards out from Castle Beach, just down here where I go down and have my lunch every day. However I've had no more luck seeing whales than the green flash. The number of whales I've seen is exactly the same as the number of green flashes I've seen. None.

I did wonder last week as I was eating my sandwich, what's the difference between whale watching and looking out to sea. If I was back home in England, sitting on Brighton Beach, could I be said to be whale watching there? Then I realized that the answer to this question is no, as there are no whales in the English Channel, whereas they are present here. I haven't seen them but I know that whales do go up and down the coast here, not far off the shore. And so it is with God. We might not always see God, feel him, have an experience that he's close by, but we're on the lookout because we know that God is present in the world.

That's the significance of this story of Pentecost. God comes to be present with his people. That's what we see in this story from Acts and there are two things. The story we always read on this Festival of Pentecost. I want to draw two things out from this story. First, is that it's a promise fulfilled. The promise that's fulfilled in this story is that God will be present with his people. When Peter goes up to explain what's happening, with all the disciples speaking in these different languages, he says we're not drunk. He said what's happening now is what was prophesied in the Old Testament.

He went to the Book of Joel and he read, this is what's spoken through the prophet Joel. 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. We see the same promise being made in the Gospel that we heard read from the Gospel of John. It's the same passage from which we've been looking at in

the last few weeks: Jesus speaking to his disciples the night before he dies. He knows they're fearful, which is why the reading ends with him saying, don't let your hearts be troubled and don't be afraid. He comforts them by saying, the Father is sending you an advocate, the Holy Spirit, who will be with you forever. Again, the promise of God's presence with his people.

If you heard my sermon a couple of weeks ago, you'll know the significance of the language that we see in John here. The spirit, Jesus says, will abide with you, he'll dwell with you, he'll mena with you, was the Greek word we were thinking about a couple of weeks ago. In other words, Jesus is saying, I'll be present with you by my Spirit. As I say, this is the subject of a sermon recently and in the passage that we were looking at then, Jesus said, those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them and we will come to them and make our home with them.

That's the promise fulfilled at Pentecost. The coming of the Spirit was God coming by his Spirit to dwell, to abide with his people. Saint Paul picks up that theme in his book of Ephesians, where we read this. I pray, he says, "according to the riches of God's glory that he may grant you that you might 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.

Since Pentecost that promise has been fulfilled and the Spirit of God is given to us to dwell in our hearts. He's present deep in our inner being. How many of us live our lives conscious of that amazing truth? Do we notice that we live our lives in the presence of God? There was a botanist from New Zealand who was up in the mountains of the South Island, looking for a particular type of orchid. She'd been there three weeks and not found it. She was so disconcerted, she sat down to have a final picnic while admiring the view. As she got up to leave, and she started to pack away her things, she realized that she'd had her lunch sitting on the very orchid that she spent three weeks searching for. If we're to notice the God who is present with us, we need to slow down. To find stillness and silence, to be attentive to Him, to God who is close by, the Spirit who dwells within us deep in our inner beings.

So Pentecost is about a promise fulfilled. It's also about a people transformed. The story in Acts begins with the disciples gathered together in one place. We're not told

what they were doing there, they might well have been hiding. They'd been rather a confused, bedraggled group since the death and resurrection of Jesus. They weren't sure what to do next. They'd kept themselves to themselves, largely out of timidity and fear. Well, that all changed at Pentecost. The spirit came on them like the rushing of a violent wind, tongues afire, rested on each one of them.

The people were amazed that they spoke in all these different languages, but the real miracle isn't so much that they were speaking in different languages, is that they were speaking at all. Up to this point, they'd not even told anyone about what had happened to Jesus. They'd been quiet, but here's Peter, who just a few weeks earlier in the story denied even knowing Jesus, going out to the crowd that gathered and boldly proclaiming to anyone who would listen the truth of Jesus of Nazareth. I once read in the paper back in England, about a man called Chris Andrews, who was one of those disastrous DIY people, who the papers always find interesting. Do people know what DIY is? Do it yourself, or DYI in my case, do yourself in.

This article cataloged the incidents that Chris Andrews had got caught up in, though thankfully this was towards the end of the story. He had become much more safety conscious, so when putting up some speakers on the wall, he did remember to first turn off the electricity. Unable to understand why his electric drill had stopped working, he took it apart to see what the fault was. Having failed to find anything wrong with it, he tried to put it back together. He couldn't because he couldn't find all the parts. So he took it back to the store, got the new drill, took that home, and found that wouldn't work either. He was about to go back to the store for another time, when his wife came home and reminded him that he had turned off the electricity and that might have something to do with his drills not working.

What happens at Pentecost is like the electricity being turned on. That's what's happening in this story. The disciples found a power supply they hadn't had before and they were transformed. This power, the power of the spirit, is available to all Christian people. Let's not fiddle around like Chris Andrews with the power supply turned off. Let's tap in to the power of God's Spirit. Saint Paul writes this in II Corinthians, and of all of us, seeing the glory of the Lord, as though reflected in a mirror. Our being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes

from the Lord, the Spirit. He's talking there about the promise of transformation that comes through the power of God's Spirit. We can all open ourselves up to that possibility.

I met this week with a couple of people in church who want to explore that. They were talking about moving beyond simply attending church on a Sunday to explore what it means to be transformed by God's Spirit. So we're going to open ourselves up to that possibility and growth by following the well-known 12 step program, and look out for more details of that cause in the next couple of weeks.

Let me close by saying that Pentecost, what we're celebrating today is not about the past. This is not simply a story about what happened to the disciples all those years ago. It's not just about how they were transformed. It's about how we, and all God's people, can be transformed by the gift of God's Holy Spirit. What we need as we begin together this new chapter in the life of Saint James, isn't so much new structures and new service, new liturgies, new bylaws, new committees. All of these without the Holy Spirit are like a dead body without a soul. What we need above all else is an infusion of enthusiasm, inspiration, courage and spiritual strength. We need to persevere in our love without discouragement and cynicism, with renewed faith in the future.

In other words, we need a fresh outpouring of God's Holy Spirit, that's what will come, make a difference, transform us, renew us. So join me in praying that God will pour on us the gift of His Spirit. I hope you're not disappointed to hear that I don't have a master plan for Saint James. There are some things that need to be addressed, but I see my main job as practicing these sermons. I want to see where God is at work amongst us by His Spirit and then join in with what He is doing by His Spirit.

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

Amen.