

Are You Pentecostal?

In order for the story of the first Pentecost to mean anything to us the adjective Pentecostal needs to remain in our vocabulary. This word cannot simply be a noun "Pentecost" representing a date, a place, an event in the history of the church. It cannot simply be a memory, an item, something back there somewhere. We need to insist that the word is an adjective; it describes the church. The word, then, is "Pentecostal."

If the church is alive in the world it is Pentecostal. And you thought we were Anglicans!

How do we keep this aliveness, this fire burning, this spirit moving? What must exist in us, around us, and through us, if we are to be Pentecostal? The passage from Acts suggests three things: Unity, prayer and repentance.

We are to be in one accord. When the day of Pentecost came, we learn, that the apostles were all together in one place waiting for the Holy Spirit to come upon them. Beginning with Easter, the resurrected Christ had appeared at various intervals to the disciples. They knew beyond a shadow of a doubt that he was the eternal living Lord. Now he had ascended to the Father and they waited in expectation, for what Jesus had referred to before his ascension as the coming of the Holy Spirit. The result would be the beginning of the church something that couldn't happen without God's power. It was because they had the power of God that they were able to witness to the those in Jerusalem with such conviction.

This power came on a day when they were in one accord, as the King James Version puts it. In other words, there was unity and agreement. There was a commonality among them. We are also told at verse 10 the devout Jews from all over the Roman world heard the disciples "speaking in their own languages about God's deeds of power." What is important about this is although many languages were heard on that day, the message spoken was clear and there was agreement. They spoke with one voice.

As we reflect on the Anglican Communion to which we belong like the early church ours is a church where God's is worshipped and his word is proclaimed in many different languages. The primate's wrote in their letter:

“We give thanks to God for the diversity of the Anglican Communion, with its 75 million Christians, witnessing in 164 countries in a thousand languages; and for the faithful and courageous witness of Anglicans as they seek to bring God's love into situations of hardship, danger and despair.”

The Primates were also aware of the underlying tension within the Communion surrounding the issue of same sex blessings. In order to give direction to help maintain the unity within the Communion they issued the following statement: "The question of public rites for the blessing of same sex unions is still a cause of potentially divisive controversy. The Archbishop of Canterbury spoke for us all when he said that it is through liturgy that we express what we believe, and that there is no theological consensus about same sex unions. Therefore, we as a body cannot support the authorization of such rites." This statement is in keeping with what the majority of the Bishops of the Anglican Communion agreed to at Lambeth 1998 when they wrote:

- in view of the teaching of Scripture this conference upholds faithfulness in marriage between a man and a woman in lifelong union, and believes that abstinence is right for those who are not called to marriage;
- while rejecting homosexual practice as incompatible with Scripture, calls on all our people to minister pastorally and sensitively to all irrespective of sexual orientation and to condemn irrational fear of homosexuals, violence within marriage and any trivialisation and commercialization of sex;
- cannot advise the legitimizing or blessing of same sex unions nor ordaining those involved in same gender unions.

The Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams referred to the Lambeth Resolution as the authoritative position of the overwhelming majority of Anglicans in the World wide communion and warned that any individual diocese or even province that officially overturns or repudiates the resolution poses a substantial problem for the sacramental unity of the communion.

Sadly, in spite of the clear direction of the Primates and the Archbishop Rowan William's prediction of the problems that would arise if a diocese overturns or repudiates this resolution Bishop Michael Ingham and the Synod of New Westminster have ignored the Primate's most recent statement and the 1998 Lambeth resolution.

At last count 14 primates have responded to what Bishop Ingham has done in a letter

written last week:

Bishop Ingham by deliberately and intentionally abandoning the established Anglican consensus, has placed himself and his diocese in an automatic state of impaired communion with the majority within the Anglican Communion.

The unfortunate situation at New Westminster has taken the diocese far beyond the generally accepted teaching of the church and a declaration has already been made that communion has been severed as a result. Bishop Ingham's action has brought the Anglican Communion to a defining moment in which the clear choice has to be made between remaining a communion or disintegrating into a federation of churches.

We, the undersigned, Primates in the Anglican Communion, declare our commitment to firmly and resolutely address this revisionist innovation and affirm the moral authority of the Primates within the communion and, at the same time, promote common faith and practice within the communion.

The Anglican Communion cannot ignore the blatantly divisive course of action initiated by Bishop Ingham and the Synod of New Westminster within the Anglican Church of Canada. Consequently, we urge all Anglicans who love their communion to join us in the call to action.

II

Secondly, and for this one I have to dip back into chapter 1, verse 14, we are told: "They all joined together constantly in prayer." Do you know where the church is growing the fastest? Not in Europe and North America but in Africa, and Latin America and South East Asia. For some years now there have been massive revivals taking place in these southern countries. A cornerstone of this revival is prayer.

Prayer is so important because it is through prayer that we more fully come to have the mind of God and order our life as a church according to his will. It is interesting to observe that the fourteen primates who wrote this letter of concern all come from these southern provinces of the Communion.

Like the early church they are expecting the Holy Spirit to move in their presence and change lives. For those of us in the North I think too many churches are trying to go it alone. In light of what has occurred in New Westminster, and because of the possibility that at the General Synod of the Anglican Church of Canada next May there will be a national vote on same sex blessings, we are called to prayer. To that end I am going to work with like-minded priests in our diocese and across the country to work on establishing a network of prayer where we can meet together to intercede on behalf this Communion as we are at this Crossroads.

III

If we are to be a Pentecostal church we need to repent. If there is a moral crisis in the life of a person, he must repent. If there is a moral crisis in the event of a nation, it must repent. If there is a moral crisis in the life of a church, she must repent. Pentecost is possible only where sin is adequately dealt with. Peter, the churches first leader, understood this. In the very first sermon of the church Peter reminded them of their most glaring error: God was a work through Jesus, Peter proclaimed to them, but you handed him over, put him to death nailing him to the cross. But God raised him from the dead and exalted to the right hand of God. He then repeated the accusation one more time in verse 36: “Let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ.”

When he had finished giving his sermon, which takes up the last half of chapter two, the people ask of him: “What shall we do?” His response: “Repent.”

But what is repentance, you might ask? For these first believers it was simply this: Changing their mind. Realizing their error. Accepting the one they once condemned. Becoming what they once ridiculed. Receiving Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of their sins. This is repentance! And it has not changed. It is by this act that we receive the gift of the Holy Spirit today. Through unity, prayer, and repentance we can be Pentecostal Anglicans through whom the power of the Holy Spirit is at work.

“Pray, that by the power of the Holy Spirit, the Anglican Communion, may everywhere be a faithful witness to what God has done in Christ, and to the abundant fullness of life to which he calls us.”