**MESSAGE**

*Come Holy Spirit and fill our hearts with the fire of your love, Amen*

Hands up if you’ve ever thought “I can’t be bothered reading this story, I’ll just skip to the last few pages and find out how it ends?!”

If you want to tell a story, you really do need to know where it begins. It’s no use jumping in half way through, and it’s no good just skipping to the end. You have to know where the story starts.

So I ask you this – where does the story of the Church begin?

In the words of Rogers and Hammerstein, “Lets start at the very beginning, it’s a very good place to start”

Does the story of the Church start at Creation? Does the Church begin at the very moment that the world begins?

Does it start at the birth of Jesus? When God sent a Saviour for all mankind?

Or does it start on Easter Sunday? When we are all redeemed by the Jesus dying for our sake and a community gathers around the risen Christ.

Or is the start of the Church actually today, Pentecost? When the Holy Spirit visits the apostles and they become advocates of the Christian faith.

The story of Pentecost as told in the Bible is let’s be frank a bit of a strange one. It all seems fantastical, surreal, other worldly.

Buildings shaking, violent winds, fire appearing above people’s heads, people speaking in tongues. Don’t you agree that its all a bit, well, spooky?!

I don’t know about fire appearing from nowhere and the sudden ability to speak foreign languages, and I wonder whether, and I appreciate this is an interpretation of the text, in fact this isn’t a bit of an exaggeration, a re-imagining, of what actually happened.

What we do know is that something changed. In fact it seems everything changed.

Maybe at that moment the Holy Spirit moved these Christian friends to the extent that it was clear something had changed in them. Rather than their heads being on fire, maybe there was a dramatic and special glow about them that they just didn’t have before, an allure, a confidence and an appearance that was appealing and compelling. Maybe their hearts were on fire and it showed.

And maybe rather than speaking tongues actually what they gained was the ability to communicate with all sorts of people they never thought that they would be speaking to. They now find that they can go out and make sense of all that is around them, and can explain in persuasive and attractive ways the Christian message of hope and salvation to this great diverse crowd of pilgrims assembling from every nation in Jerusalem.

They can build bridges with strangers, empathise with the disadvantaged, bring hope and healing to the sick. They can communicate with absolutely anybody they come across. They can deliver the message and the message is understood.

And so the early Christians begin to truly pick up the commission that they have been given – to go and make followers of Christ at all the ends of the earth.

'Go and make disciples to the ends of the Earth', says Jesus, 'make disciples of all nations'.

And through this mission the community gathered around the risen Christ grows – the Church begins.

At Pentecost the Holy Spirit comes down on the Church to empower those that believed and to give them the tools to spread the good news. The Holy Spirit connects those early believers with Jesus and through Jesus those believers are connected with God. It was the Holy Spirit that fostered fellowship between those early Christian believers, and it is the Holy Spirit continues to foster the fellowship amongst us today.

Church is what happens when Jesus is present and gathers people to Him in the name of the father, reconciles them to eachother and to God and builds them up into a new community. And this is all achieved through the intervention of the Holy Spirit.

We need connection to God – a loving father who knows all our sins and forgives us without hesitation, a father who accepts and loves us for who we are and what we are not what we do and don’t do – and that connection is made possible by the Holy Spirit.

We need connection with eachother – connection with eachother within our communities, and connection with eachother outside of our communities. We need to understand the stranger, help the needy, and pray for our enemy. And all this is made possible through the Holy Spirit.

It is the Holy Spirit that gives us the words to speak of the good news and the skills and the confidence to communicate that message effectively – and it is the Holy Spirit that gives us the energy and desire to take that message to the ends of the earth.

We do all this not in our own strength, nor in our own wisdom, we do it in the strength and wisdom and the unconditional relentless love of God. The love of God brought to us by the Holy Spirit.

By the Holy Spirit, through the Holy Spirit, and in the Holy Spirit, Thy Kingdom Come.

So as we celebrate the birth of the Church today at Pentecost we should have just one prayer:

Come, Holy Spirit, come.

Amen.