

Acts 2:1-21, John 15:26-27; 16:4b-15

(Figure 1) I am just old enough to remember the last days of the Whit Walks in Darnall, Sheffield in the late 1950s (though not so old as to remember the one in the photograph!). I don't think it is a tradition that spread as far south as Derby. Having its roots in the English religious holiday week of Whitsuntide, which had degenerated into an excuse for drunkenness, leading to its suppression in most places, the revived 'tradition' dates from 1821 in Manchester, when processions of Sunday School children were organised to celebrate the coronation of George IV. In subsequent years it became an annual event, with different Christian denominations organising their 'walks' on different days of Whit week. The tradition must have spread across the Pennines to Sheffield where, on Whit Monday all around the City processions from various churches would be organised, to meet up in a local spot in each district. In Darnall the obvious place to congregate was High Hazels Park and I remember an open-air service there, by the side of the boating lake (rather strangely constructed on the top of the hill!), with music provided by the band of the Salvation Army, from their Darnall Citadel. At the time it was the only obvious manifestation of œcumenical endeavour, and it made a great act of witness, though I suspect it had more than an undertone of competition as each church and chapel vied to put on the best show.

(Figure 2) The account of the first Whit Sunday, or Pentecost, given by S. Luke in the Acts of the Apostles, is a similarly public affair. The Apostles were gathered together when suddenly there was a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and tongues 'as of fire' rested on each of them and they were driven outside and found themselves speaking in the streets in foreign languages so distinct that all the Jews assembled in Jerusalem at that time could, no matter where they came from across the known world (giving rise each year to the difficulty for the person reading the lesson having to list the names of all the provinces), understand what they were saying. (Figure 3) Amazement and perplexity at this phenomenon was the result, but it was not long before some in the crowd began to sneer and suggest that drunkenness lay behind the manifestation. That always seems a ridiculous suggestion to me, excessive drink is more likely to make the speaker incoherent, rather than fluent, but Peter counters the claim by pointing to the early hour in the morning and then links all that the disciples have been saying to the prophecy of Joel that there would come a day when the Spirit of God would be poured out upon all flesh, women and men, young and old, all ranks and conditions and there would be signs in the heavens and on the earth and then, "everyone who call on the name of the Lord shall be saved." Peter goes on to outline the story of Jesus and his centrality in this history of salvation and so convinced were many of his hearers that about three thousand that day joined the Apostles' band of believers.

This idea of dramatic conversion and the unaccountable action of the Holy Spirit has reanimated the church many times over the centuries since that first Pentecost, and some churches today confidently expect to see regular manifestations of the Spirit working in them in dramatic ways, including 'speaking in tongues' and forms of ecstatic worship. Such manifestations always make me feel a little uneasy, because my most profound religious experiences have been more inward, and I suspect I would have been among the more cautious in the crowd in Jerusalem.

Today's reading from John's Gospel encourages to look from a slightly different point of view.

(Figure 4) Here Jesus is preparing the disciples for what is to come in their near future. He will be going away from them, but his going will be to their advantage, as that will be the opportunity for the coming of the Advocate, the Spirit of truth to come. The Spirit will come to do several things, all of

which are calculated to shew who Jesus was and the significance of what he had done. The Spirit will shew that the ways of the world and the lessons it teaches will lead not to glory but to condemnation. Whilst the death of Jesus at the Crucifixion will be revealed not as a humiliating execution but as the royal road to glory for Jesus and for those who follow him.

We know, because John tells us so himself, that the contents of his gospel were written not just as a record of things that happened, but in order that the reader might come to believe in Jesus, and the verses of today's reading tell us that the Holy Spirit comes not only to the first disciples then, but also to us today to be our guide and mentor in coming to a more complete grasp of Jesus' work in reuniting us, and all creation, with God.

(Figure 5) This is essentially what happened at the first Pentecost, when so many came to believe, and it is what can happen in churches and mass gatherings of folk today. But it can also happen in individual lives, like yours and mine, so we pray in John Dryden's translation of the ninth century words of the *Veni Creator Spiritus*:

*Creator Spirit, by whose aid  
The world's foundations first were laid,  
Come, visit every pious mind;  
Come, pour thy joys on humankind;  
From sin and sorrow set us free,  
And make thy temples worthy thee.*

Clive Lemmon



*Figure 1: Setting off on the Whit Walk from Holy Trinity, Darnall, Sheffield about 1910.*



*Figure 2: Icon of the first Pentecost.*



*Figure 3: Peter speaking to the crowd.*



*Figure 4: Jesus explains things to his disciples.*



*Figure 5: Whit Sunday in Norway in 2014.*