**Pentecost Sunday**

**Acts 2:1-21**

It was a little over a year ago when we, at St. Andrew’s, endorsed our Mission Action Plan and the then Archdeacon, Luke Miller, came and launched it for us. And at the heart of the Mission Action Plan were these Five Marks of Mission that would frame our activities and our priorities for the future.

And very deliberately, we didn’t come up with a strategic plan with timelines for activities. Instead, very deliberately, we outlined our sense of Mission as a series of aspirations and noted that we would then wait on the Holy Spirit of God to lead us forward and show us what the priorities for this church should be at each stage.

I am completely convinced that this was exactly the right thing to do because what we have seen over the last year is a huge increase in the mission-mindedness of this church family and God has achieved a great deal here. Some things we may have expected and prioritised ourselves but other things have come as a surprise: setting up a Twins and Multiple Births Group, Dad’s with Young Children Group, new midweek services, Facebook Spirituality and so on…these things were not really on our radar on a human level but the Spirit of God has led us into these areas of mission and ministry.

We have changed our strapline, which now reads “Church at the heart of Enfield”. And the aspiration there is not that we just reflect on our geographical location as being set in central Enfield but that we both reflect and inspire the spiritual heartbeat of this town and that, whatever is happening in our community, for good and bad, St. Andrew’s will become increasingly at the heart of that - offering a witness to God’s grace and love and compassion.

This week, we have had Prayer Week, with these wonderful Prayer Stations - and I can tell you that the response in the community has been quite incredible. Not only have we had daily visits from the Primary School and seen the lives of children touched, their spirituality deepened; not only have we had a huge amount of feedback about how that interaction has led dozens of families to reflect together on the Christian faith…But each and every day, those of us who have been a part of this Prayer Week have met with many, many people coming through the church to interact with God through the prayer stations. There have been a whole host of wonderful conversations to be had in all sorts of ways.

But most poignant have been those conversations that have resulted in deep sharing of pain in the lives of broken people…The children who are suffering bereavement and have found a way this week to open up about it through the Prayer Stations. The person struggling with a terrible, life-wasting addiction who wanted me to pray with them. The individual whose mother-in-law is terminally ill and even though they are not a Christian, wanted to share that with us. The young man who we stood with by the altar as he threw the stone into the water and released years of pent up anger with a family member. The homeless man who came into church and told us that he didn’t have a sleeping bag , so would it be OK if he took the one from our display at the back? We gave him the bag and enough food from the Foodbank bin to get him through the week.

This week, we have met people with fear, sickness, poverty, anger, grief and so much more - and St. Andrew’s has lived out its missional calling to be “Church at the heart of Enfield”.

And it’s not just isolated to this week, of course. You will have noticed, I’m sure, over the last few months, that this church is increasingly becoming a refuge, a safe place, for those who feel vulnerable and broken. The light of the Gospel – and the deeply embedded value of non-judgemental welcome here is drawing in those who are feeling frail and lost.

That is what it means to be a Mission-Shaped Church.

That is what it means to be “Church at the heart of Enfield”.

But here is the rub, of course…

The more we become a spiritual refuge for the vulnerable, the more ‘messy’ church becomes…We have seen that recently, of course, in another Sunday service.

But too often, the history of the church is wrapped up in the pursuit of beauty, the pursuit of order and stability, as if holiness can be defined by the beauty of the liturgy and hymns and the well-structured nature of the worship. Well, beautiful hymns and liturgy and attractive worship is very important: I would never suggest otherwise. But the truth of the Christian message is that Beauty resides in Ugliness and Mess. That idea is at the heart of the Christian faith most clearly exhibited, of course, through the cross of Christ. Never was beauty more clearly seen through ugliness and mess than when God was hung upon the cross to die a humiliating death. The beauty of salvation worked out in the ugliness and mess of human politics and ego pursuit.

Here is the rub, here is the challenge:

If we want to pursue the mission of God in Enfield, we are increasingly being confronted with the truth that we must seek beauty in ugliness and mess. We live in a broken world, a fractured community, with many frail and hurting people - and if we are to truly be “Church at the heart of Enfield”, then we must be at the heart of the brokenness, the fractures, standing with the frail and the hurting.

I am confident that we are increasingly moving into this place as a Mission-Shaped Church.

But a Mission-Shaped Church is a Messy Church…not chaotic – but messy…

Because, as we chase the Spirit of God, we will be taken into messy places. Because it’s in messy places that God is found: in the womb of a virgin, in a manger, a wilderness, a courtroom, a place of torture, on a cross, in a cold and dark tomb.

That is where God is found.

Today is Pentecost. Pentecost is the day on which we celebrate the coming of the Holy Spirit of God to us.

In the Bible, the Holy Spirit is often spoken of as a fire, which is why the liturgical colour of the day is red. It’s the day on which the fire of God’s Spirit was poured out on his disciples and the Spirit of God came to inhabit the whole of God’s creation.

Next week, the liturgical colour will go to green and we enter a long period between now and the end of November called ‘Ordinary Time’.

Which sounds a bit dull, doesn’t it?

After the excitement of Christmas and Epiphany, Lent, Holy Week, Easter and Pentecost, we go into ‘Ordinary Time’, as if nothing exciting is going to happen until Advent.

But that’s really not what it is saying at all. Instead, the ‘ordinary experience’ of Christians is to live in the power of the Holy Spirit. So we have Pentecost today – and then Ordinary Time, when we will live empowered lives, energised by the Spirit of God at work in us.

So what is the ‘ordinary experience’ of the Church if it is to live in the power of the Spirit? Well, quite simply, the ordinary experience will be messy because God is found in the mess of life.

And that is exactly what we heard in our first reading this morning that described the first Pentecost Day. The truth is that Pentecost was a messy experience for the disciples. The coming of the Holy Spirit into their midst wasn’t neat and tidy and well ordered: it was messy and – yes – verging on the chaotic but not quite tipping over into it.

What did we hear from that reading?

‘The rush of a violent wind…Filled the entire house…’

‘The people thought they were drunk…’

‘They each began speaking in their own tongue…’

‘They began speaking in other languages, as the Spirit enabled them…’

‘They were all filled with the Holy Spirit’

This was a messy event – not well-ordered at all. God poured himself out in messy abundance and through that messy abundance, a new community was born: the community of the Church.

And yet, as I mentioned a little earlier, even though it was messy, there was not chaos because, out of the mess, a united community was born. All the people there spoke in a different language and yet all proclaimed the same message. They were experiencing unity in diversity.

And so it is with us at St. Andrew’s. The reality is that, metaphorically, we may all speak different languages, which is to say we may all experience God in different ways, we may all have a different picture of God, we may all encounter his Spirit differently. But the Spirit of God makes us all one community, joined in fellowship by our common experience of God.

And as St. Andrew’s continues to grow and reach out into the community, so we will hear many different languages amongst us: metaphorically and perhaps literally too. As St. Andrew’s continues to grow and reach out into the community, so the diversity will increase, so the established will rub shoulders with the new, so both traditional and contemporary ways of being Church will need to accommodate one another, and learn to celebrate one another.

A Church that wants to be “at the heart of Enfield” will necessarily need to embrace Enfield in all its wonderful diversity, strength and brokenness. As we increasingly become a Mission-Shaped Church, pursuing the Spirit of God, so it is likely that we will become increasingly messy – though not chaotic…

And this is to be celebrated because it is a celebration of the diversity of our community and the hospitable and welcoming heart of God.

We must increasingly celebrate the diversity in our unity as we learn to recognise and celebrate God’s abundant gifts to us wrapped up in one another.

So, as we celebrate God’s abundant gifts to us – the gift of each other – we offer ourselves back to him to use us in his service however he deems fit. As Paul says in 1 Corinthians 12: “There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but the same God works all of them in all.”

The Spirit has made us one.

So, as a church, we are called to celebrate diversity and yet live in unity.

The language of God, expressed on the Day of Pentecost, was a language of unity through diversity. There is one Lord, one Church, one Baptism - but the Spirit comes to us in diverse ways and each of us hears the Good News according to our own language.

And so we are called to use our diverse gifts in the service of God so that we can bring glory to his name.

It is God’s desire for a spirit of Pentecost to inhabit our church here in Enfield.

A spirit of Pentecost that enters the walls of our church and blows amongst us, both settling on us and unsettling us.

A spirit of Pentecost that helps us to celebrate all that God has given us and offer ourselves back in service to him in the power of the Holy Spirit.

A spirit of Pentecost that will empower us and renew us and lead to the renewal of our community in Christ.

A spirit of Pentecost that may be increasingly messy but not chaotic.

Our prayer for St. Andrew’s is that we would truly become a Pentecost church, experiencing the coming of the Spirit of God, experiencing joy and hope, exhibiting love, celebrating difference, celebrating creativity, proclaiming the Good News of Christ in all we think and say and do.

Spirit of the Living God, fall afresh on us we pray. Amen.