

PENTECOST SUNDAY 2004

Nic Denny-Dimitriou - 30th May 2004

Acts 2: 1-21, Psalm 104: 26-36, Romans 8: 14-17, John 14: 8-17, 25-27

By what means does love come to us, in all its varied dimensions?

How many are the ways of falling in love?

To broaden it - include close friendships and the many ways one meets people and develops good friendships.

Regarding couples “falling in love”, if we were to tell our stories here today,

- We’d be here a very long time
- We’d be amazed at the variety of experiences

Suppose we were to note some of the different types of experiences of couples meeting and being “in love”:

- Instant attraction, “head over heels”
- Dramatic stories
- Quiet, slow, deep
- Friends for long time first
- Pursued – perhaps one not interested for long time
- Deeply romantic
- One of the most romantic weddings I ever presided at, was that of Ann (only 80-ish) and Philip (only 91) – both widowed earlier, both with several grandchildren; he literally wooed her, she was reluctant at first, but they made a most delightful married couple!

Of course what counts is what happens over the long-term.

- Growth in love over the years, in different life stages with all their challenges and pleasures
- Sustaining the relationship in good times and in hard times or through difficulties of relationship

What relevance to Pentecost? Let me come to that...

Quick-reference to Pentecost Day:

- Holy Spirit – “poured out” (interesting phrase we use – briefly elaborate) on all people of God in special way
- Power – to proclaim the things of God, to proclaim boldly the Good News of Jesus Christ

- Amazing events on Pentecost Day, as per Acts 2 – Pentecost was an existing Jewish Feast after Passover, but now had a new significance – and as promised by Jesus earlier, as per today’s Gospel reading
- God and people connecting in a powerful way
- ... All towards a point: Conversion for those not converted, and power to be disciples
- ... Focussed on relationship with God: to obey; to honour and serve; and to love – that in itself will be interesting, in terms of our reaction to that – am I comfortable with the terminology of saying “I love God”, or uncomfortable?
- Conversion – some means of knowing that I love and follow God, that I have been or will choose to be a follower of Jesus Christ.

Back to the relevance to Pentecost, of what I said earlier:

“Falling in love” – endless dimensions to it

So too, falling in love with God – endless dimensions

God calls / reaches out to humanity

Intervenes in our lives to draw attention to God

A “role” of the Spirit of God, according to our understandings from Scripture, and through the experiences of Christian leaders from the apostles onwards, and from the “Christian classics” through the ages – the writings of people who have had profound experiences of God.

The Spirit is given to empower the Christian community;

Also to move us / to gently nudge us towards God, and at times strongly propel us towards God.

That is my focus on this Pentecost Day ...

And the ways of God’s Spirit doing so are no less varied than the ways in which couples fall in love

For it is about being in love with God

That is Powerful

Not to be misunderstood: Power does NOT = dramatic / outrageous / forceful

The Power is in God coming to us in ways we relate to / ways we need / ways that will draw us to God; in God seeking out relationship with us in the first place.

God calls in different ways and we respond to God in different ways.

I often remember the story of a good friend of ours, Chris:

- Member for years of NA (Narcotics Anonymous, like AA)
- “Higher power” concept
- God’s humility in allowing people gently to find him, even via the use of such a generic term for God as “higher power”!

For every person here there will be a different story of falling in love with God.

Some possibilities include:

- Quiet, un-dramatic
- Thoughtful and considered, carefully reasoned
- Emotive
- Dramatic - such as through a single sermon / crisis of life / special event by which God intervened in our lives
- Dramatic conversion point / “moment of truth” / “Aha! Moment”
- Slow, sustained and balanced
- “Waves” of being drawn to God, yet staying away for some time
- For some, the experience of having been aware of God all of their life / as much of our life as we can ever remember
 - One type of experience not better than another – only different
 - Concern re: people who feel themselves to be “Second-class Christians” because they haven’t had a particular type of experience; we don’t use that sort of thinking when it comes to the analogy of marriage / human love!
 - Some may wish to have had a different type of experience
 - No reason we can’t ask God for a deeper experience / knowledge!

For some it will be:

- Recent
- Long past
- (Yet to come...?)

Look at some examples from Scripture, to illustrate how God comes in different ways.

As we do so, I ask you to consider your own experience.

- Spirit of creation (Hebrew word, “ruach”, synonymous for breath and spirit of God), breathing life into creation, as in Genesis
- Reference to that in our Psalm today – God breathing new life into us
- Rushing wind of Pentecost story – Peter preached boldly with wonderful results
- “Still soft voice” – the boy Samuel, at first thinking it was the priest Eli calling him
- “Still soft voice” – not in the earthquake, wind or fire, but the quiet voice of God
- The baby Jesus and the events of his birth – unexpected, unlikely, humble, yet God coming to humanity in the most profound way

- Moses – the burning bush
- Thomas the doubter – Jesus was prepared to come to him and let him have a personal experience to clear his doubt; dramatic but a story filled with humility
- Paul – Damascus Road experience – yet still had to spend several years learning and giving maturity and depth to his newfound faith in Jesus as Messiah, before he became the now-famed “St. Paul”! An instantaneous transformation, yet followed by years of development of that.

Our need is to remain open to God who comes in myriad ways, powerfully (whether it is quiet or dramatic, it is powerful when God comes to us).

Spirit: Power to live – to enable us to do that which we cannot do in our own strength

Persistence

Tenacity

The first meeting / encounter, as significant as it is, is of diminishing significance as the relationship continues, adapts and grows; what follows the early encounters truly counts.

Amazingly, God remains faithful always. Proof of this, is that God persists in pouring the Spirit upon the Church collectively, and on God’s people individually. Our God keeps covenant forever, and has placed the Spirit in us, as a seal on that friendship, like a “legal seal” on our contract. It is the Spirit who gives us boldness and power, courage and strength to keep this covenant relationship going and strengthening.

[End with words from Canticle 4 (Anglican Prayer Book p. 344) from Ezekiel 36.]