

When our children reached their 10th birthdays they both received a bedroom transformation! Tom's was particularly impressive and caused the biggest and happiest reaction. His room went from a hideous lime green to one which, in every way, communicated his love for West Ham United, but also had the additional extra of a high bed with a ladder. It seemed a great idea at the time, but I think we forgot that by 14 he would be bumping his head on the ceiling and need another change in design!

On the first birthday of the church, the transformation that occurs in the lives of the 120 followers of Christ is one that transforms believers from the inside out. Having returned to Jerusalem, they are gathered together worshipping and waiting for the promised Spirit just as Jesus told them to. Its 10 days since the ascension and the disciples are alone, feeling the emptiness of the loss of Jesus in a way that they have never experienced before. But I don't think they are afraid, – now I think they are expectant, longing for what is next, trusting Jesus words and ready to receive the power from on high that he promised.

Pentecost isn't a random choice of a day for this promise to be fulfilled. It's 50 days since Passover, and once again Jerusalem would have been bustling with people celebrating the beginning of the grain harvest, and the anniversary of when Moses received the law on Mount Sinai. People from many different nations were gathered – Jews and Gentiles alike – a cosmopolitan crowd representing the known world. Into this hubbub of excitement and gathering, the Holy Spirit would come, filling the people of God and readying them to reap the harvest of thousands of lives for Christ as they hear the good news of the Gospel and come to Him. It's the birthday of God's world-wide church and the Spirit was coming, not just for a few but for all those that followed Christ!

3 supernatural things happen that day, 3 birthday gifts are given that draw a crowd and transform the lives of those first followers of Jesus.

There's a SOUND, like the wind that fills the disciples with power. Verse 2 tells us this wasn't a gentle breeze but a sound like a violent wind that came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. It was dramatic! The walls would have shaken, the roof would have trembled – This was the power of God bringing life to the disciples, filling them and equipping them for all that Jesus had called them to do; to take the Gospel across the known world, to stand firm in the face of opposition, and to be obedient to his call even if it meant losing their own lives. Old Testament Scripture describes God in terms of breath and wind (or in Hebrew, Ruach) depicting his power and sovereignty over all, so this symbol isn't new, but it is a new era of the Spirit one which Joel

prophesised would be for all people for all time! Through the life giving divine breath of the spirit, lives would be transformed.

Secondly, there is a SIGHT that seemed to be like tongues of fire coming to rest on each disciple. Fire in Scripture represents the presence of God. Think of Moses standing on Holy Ground before God who speaks to him from the burning bush, or the fire of God's presence leading the Israelites through the desert by day. And it was a coal from the fire that touched the lips of Isaiah, purifying him ready for God call on him as a prophet. Here the Spirit of God comes like flames of fire settling over each disciple, purifying them for the call on their lives and equipping them to speak in the languages of the many gathered together. Where they had felt the loss and emptiness after Jesus Ascension, now they were full to overflowing with the presence of God himself.

Crowds gather and the disciples begin to SPEAK in the languages of those around them. It would have been a bewildering cacophony of noise as the disciples praised God, declaring His wonders so that all could hear and of course all could respond. No wonder people asked what does this mean? How was it possible that Egyptians, Romans, Jews and Gentiles could understand from a few rough and ready, uneducated Galileans the wonders of God? Why was this happening?

It was happening because the good news of Jesus death and resurrection was for the whole world to hear beginning with those first followers. They were being equipped to go and as Christians today, you and I are basically vessels of God (as they were) carrying His spirit with us wherever we go. We are never on our own, we can always draw on His strength and His help. He is transforming us into the likeness of his son and he gives us gifts to use for his glory and purposes. And crucially, the Spirit is for all who believe, all races, nationalities equipping all to pass on the Good News from generation to generation.

When life is tough and I'm tired or I feel far from God I can sometimes wonder if God has given up on me and gone elsewhere! What a lie that is! Ephesians 2 promises us that those who believe in Christ are marked with a seal, the promised spirit confirming that they belong to God and will spend eternity with Him. Sometimes we give out so much that we need refilling (or refuelling) in order to keep going! And sometimes I feel like I've a hole in my bucket and am leaking as I doubt and wrestle with personal sin. I need God to pour his Spirit on me again, give me a good soaking that I might be full again.

That's why we pray that God would refresh us and restore us and equip us to live for Him. Because in order to take the Good News of Jesus to our friends, neighbours, work colleagues, children etc. we need to be constantly topped up with His Spirit, relying on him for help and

confident in the truth that we are his children who are loved and belong to him.

CONCLUSION

I love a good birthday party with friends and it will be so lovely this year to not be in lockdown and be free and legal to celebrate. Today is the birthday of the Church – it's a wonderful, joyful celebration of God's gift of the Holy Spirit. And next year I hope it will be a bigger party as those we have shared Jesus with in the year ahead join us in praise of the wonders of God.

May I encourage you to enjoy every gift that the Spirit gives, and to continue to come to God and ask Him to fill you with his powerful, purifying presence but may I also encourage you to remember those first disciples and to go, beyond these gardens and share Jesus in your homes, in your city, and across our nation and beyond. The Gospel is good news for the whole world – how can we keep it to ourselves especially when Jesus has generously equipped us to share it?