

PENTECOST 2019 – SPIRIT BREAK OUT BBC Programme – Bishop Jill Duff

John 20.19-23

Acts 2.1-18

As we stand, let us PRAY:

Come down O most powerful Holy Spirit and subdue us. From heaven where the ordinary is made glorious, and glory seems but ordinary, bathe us with the brilliance of Your light like dew. Amen

Take a seat:

“When the Day of Pentecost came, they were altogether in one place”

In hiding

In waiting

For the gift promised by Jesus – His Spirit, His breath

And on this day in the year 33 AD, to an unlikely huddle of people in hiding, in waiting

There came fire, there came wind – the breath of God - no coincidence on the same festival celebrating the legendary fire and wind which came to Moses on the mountain

They were filled with the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Jesus, the same “power from on high” that brought Jesus back from the dead

And the result?

That people (from all over the known world), heard them

Declaring the wonders of God in their own languages.

Now for some light relief. One of my colleagues in Lancashire, Bishop Philip North, has coined a modern day heresy.

He’s called it *Declinism* – and I’ve written a spoof lecture about it on our website. This is the heresy, prevalent in the West, that simply says:

The Church across the world is in terminal decline, because the ongoing work of Jesus through the power of His Holy Spirit is something of the past. Although some subscribe to an element of Christ’s ongoing work, this bears no relation in efficacy to the power of the Holy Spirit who brought Jesus back from the dead.

The thing is - This heresy simply just doesn’t fit the data from across the world. Throughout Scripture and throughout history, the Day of Pentecost was just the start. Ever since then, the Spirit has been enabling people to hear the wonders of God in their own language. “Young men have seen visions and old men have dreamed dreams.”

Let me take you back to the time of St Cuthbert in 7th century. There was an incredible flowering of mission in the North. You may have heard of St Hilda – she was abbess of a mixed monastery in Whitby that sent out bishops, evangelists all across Britain. You may not have heard of Caedmon. He was a cattle herd, who looked after the animals in the monastery. He was shy and tongue tied: he found it very difficult to make himself understood. But one night he has this dream that he can sing a heavenly song about the creation of the world. When he wakes up he can remember the song – in fact he can still sing it. He tells his boss

and his boss tells Hilda who invites Caedmon to sing at the feast. This was the start of an incredible ministry – Caedmon would sing the gospel in the local Anglo-Saxon language in words that the ordinary people could understand.

The thing is, I keep spotting Caedmon's everywhere. Often in hiding, tongue-tied, unable to get their words out, but it seems the Spirit of God releases them to speak the wonders of God in their own language. It is beautiful to behold

Here in Preston, Smith Wigglesworth used to preach in the 1930s. Early on in his story, he was so fearful to speak he used to leave the preaching to his wife because he couldn't get his words out.

Across our nation today there are people hiding away, tongue-tied, but I believe the Spirit of God wants to come to call you out of hiding, to release your tongues so that people can hear the wonders of God in their own language

A new Pentecost, today and every day.

What if we had people on fire with the Spirit of Jesus "break out" in every sphere of society: in our families, our churches, in our schools and universities, in the media, in business, in law, in government, in entertainment and sport [even wrestling!] - so people could hear the wonders of God in their own language? What might this look like?

In the reading from John's gospel, Jesus breathed on them and said: "Receive the Holy Spirit"

What would it look like for Jesus to breathe on our nation today?

CS Lewis describes this with beautiful imagination in his children's book: *The Lion, The Witch and the Wardrobe*.

The lion Aslan, back from the dead, ransacks the White Witch's fortress where she has taken hundreds of creatures captive, by turning them into stone.

Aslan bounds up to a stone lion and breathes on him. What happens is a bit like someone putting a lighted match to newspaper in a grate ... at first nothing seems to have happened, then the flames creep along the newspaper ... and so colours lick all over the lion who opens his mouth, warm and living and gives an enormous yawn. I quote: "Everywhere the statues were coming to life. The courtyard looked no longer like a museum; it looked more like a zoo ... and instead of the deadly silence, the whole place rang with the sound of happy roaring, braying, yelping, barking, squealing, cooing, neighing, stampings... songs and laughter".
[Chapter XVI]

In our Diocese of Blackburn, Bishop Julian Henderson has been encouraging us to pray for a visitation of - the - Holy Spirit - on the people of Lancashire. Just as we are a county that has ancient beacon sites on the hills, so we are praying there will be beacons lit across every sphere of our society, by which I mean beacons of men, women and children on fire with the Spirit of God, naturally shining the light of Jesus into their communities, so people can hear the gospel in their own language. So people can experience the love, the joy, the peace of Jesus, as they meet Him – alive and living. Today.

Did you know that across the world, Christians from 85 countries have been praying for the last 10 days #ThyKingdomCome. Praying that 5 friends would meet Jesus: alive and living. Today.

My prayer, my longing today is that the Spirit of God, the Spirit of Jesus would break out across our nation, breathing over our counties, fanning embers into flame, statues into life, waking the sleepers, setting prisoners free, so that there is a wonderful chattering, songs and laughter up and down the land....people hearing the wonders of God in their own languages.

Come Holy Spirit, Come Breath of God. Spirit Break out. Today. In the Name of Jesus.

Amen.