

There is change in the air. Many primary schools will start going back next week. Shops will be opening. And we are planning for church openings. All of these will be a gradual process, and a learning process. We will need patience and we will need to listen to each other.

Both of those are skills we have had to hone, to improve, over the last weeks. How to fill unexpected free time, how to learn new technology and its etiquette as well as practicalities. How to let out our feelings and how to let others do the same. And we will need kindness too with these changes. We have seen the most wonderful acts of kindness and sharing recently, but what will happen in the next stage – will they continue? I hope things have changed, but I fear that we may well fall back into old ways or bad ways – remember the panic buying at the beginning? Old ways & bad ways – or original sin as my grandfather would call it. It is what happens when we let anger or fear drive us.

Because the changes ahead are not to bring us back to where we were – they will move us on. There will still be new ways of living to learn, and I think most of us are tired of that. So, we will need to be kind.

Pentecost is all about change. It is about moving forward. It is also about fear and anger.

We know this story so well. The disciples are all in one place, in a house. We know that fear of others, of what might happen next has been part of how they live. But then there is this incredible experience – what is like wind, what is like fire, and the speaking in different languages.

A crowd gathers to hear this amazing sound – each recognising their own language. They are amazed and perplexed, and they also sneer. And Peter responds – with a joke first, then a reminder of the prophecy from Joel. A prophecy that speaks of change for all ages and all generations and of new ideas and of the need to turn to God, and of the alternative.

Over the Sundays of Easter, we have heard the rest of these account from Acts- the rest of Peter's sermon and of the effect it has on people. Repentance and sharing.

Our focus is very much on the Acts of the Apostles – the early church, how it grows and changes. How they learn, how they listen, how they make mistakes, but how they try to keep their focus.

That focus on Acts in our Pentecost worship means that we know that reading well – the glorious list of names, the powerful imagery of wind and fire and breath that translate so well into music and art and worship for all ages. We sometimes forget that there is a Gospel as well. And we are given a choice in this year a – the first of our three-year cycle of readings – both from St John. And I went for chapter 20, for the post resurrection appearance. Because it seems to me that it speaks to where we are. The disciples are inside, afraid of what will happen next, and then Jesus is with them. His first words are peace- then he shows them his wounds – then he says peace. He sends them, he breaths on them with the Holy Spirit. Then he says if you forgive, it is forgiven; if you retain, it is retained.

That is the path we are to follow. We will slowly move out from our places of sanctuary or imprisonment or both; we need to hear the message of peace; we need to acknowledge the wounds and the pain and the hurt. And then we need to remind ourselves of Christ's peace; of the spirit that he has breathed on us. At last, an image of breath as life giving and hope, not as infection and fear. And a reminder that to move forwards, we cannot hold onto anger and fear, for that way sin lies.

We recognise the pain caused, we learn from it, and we move forward together in peace, maybe with scars, certainly with changes, but moving forward in peace.

These are not new lessons we learn this Pentecost – the readings are the same. Yes, they speak to us in a certain way this year, but they do that every year. This is why we read the Bible -through each time, through each experience, we learn more, about ourselves, about the world around us, about God.

Pentecost is about change – it is about celebration and rejoicing but doing so because something has changed. It is about communicating that change to others; it is about going forward ourselves, filled with the breath of God, so that we leave behind the fear and the anger, and walk towards the light.