



Pentecost 2025

Today we find Jesus' followers once again shut up in a room, feeling uncertain after losing Jesus all over again. The strange joy they had at meeting an unutterably changed Christ has gone as he disappears to heaven. Luke paints that scene brilliantly. The bewildered disciples staring up into heaven, not understanding what has happened or what is supposed to happen next. Jesus had talked about changing the world, but how on earth are they supposed to do that? But then... their anxiety about what they could possibly do in the face of impossible odds is overtaken by an explosion of God's love within them.

This group of not particularly distinguished, not formally educated, not ordained or licensed for ministry, not known for their eloquence or even their stickability when the going got tough – this group, directionless and waiting, are so completely saturated by the power, the love, the joy, the Spirit of the resurrected Christ, that they cannot help but burst out of the room where they have sequestered themselves away from the world, in to the world – an explosion of God's transforming love that fills Jerusalem, and then the Roman Empire, and then the whole world.

Because that explosion reverberates in our souls today, we think of Jerusalem as the centre of God's activity on earth. And that's how the Hebrew scriptures see Jerusalem, and particular its temple: The place where God is present in a way unlike anywhere else on the planet – and to which, in the fulness of time, all the nations of the world will come for healing and redemption. But, of course, in political reality, Jerusalem was far from the centre of the world. Ancient Israel was a tiny kingdom surrounded by enormous empires to which it often paid tribute. In Jesus' time, Palestine it was an insignificant desert outpost of the Roman empire – it always makes me think of Tatooine in the Star Wars universe, Luke Skywalker's home planet – and indeed, part of what the stories of Jesus' birth in Luke and Matthew are trying to show us is the paradox of the central event of human history happening to an ordinary, struggling family in an unglamorous part of the world.

This is the same paradox that the Hebrew Scriptures give us. There is nothing particular about Israel that deserves such lavish attention; indeed, God has chosen them to be his special people *because* of their ordinariness. It is God's unwavering, utterly reliable love for Israel, his "longing" (*Psalms 132.14*) as the psalmist puts it, to be intimate with Israel, that will serve as a witness to the whole world of what God's love is like: a love on which the whole universe can depend for its existence and with which each one of us, however ordinary, can expect to be lavished on our particularity – our individual, peculiar existence.

In 70AD, the Romans demolished the Temple in Jerusalem – and remains so to this day. This produced a crisis for the Jewish people. Because the temple was the unique place where heaven and earth met, it was the only place where sacrificial worship could happen. So different Jewish groups began to come up with new centres for devotion and worship. The ancestors of our present-day Jewish cousins were the Rabbinic Jews, who found the place where heaven meets earth in the Torah, the first five books of the Bible where God's law and love for his people is revealed. So today, if you visit a synagogue, the place where the Torah scroll is kept is holy, honoured with a perpetually burning light – a flame. The Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles were all produced after this cataclysmic event, even though the events they narrate took place beforehand, and show where another group of first Century Jews – the followers of Jesus – found the place where heaven meets earth. In the person of Jesus Christ, both God and Man.

In Jesus the promise of the Hebrew prophets comes to pass: that the whole world will experience the revelation of God's love in Jerusalem and its temple. But not quite how anybody expected. In his ministry, Jesus compared his body to the temple and everyone, including the disciples, were non-plussed.

Jesus answered them, 'Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.' The Jews then said, 'This temple has been under construction for forty-six years, and will you raise it up in three days?' But he was speaking of the temple of his body. After he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this; and they believed the scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken. (*John 2.19-22*)

But afterwards they begin to understand – once the risen, ascended Lord has sent his Spirit to fill the whole earth *through* his body, the Church.

Later in John's Gospel (*John 19.31-34*), as Jesus' crucified body is pierced by a spear, blood and water flow from his side – symbols of Baptism and the Eucharist, the

sacraments which make us part of his risen and glorified body. But no first- or second-century Jew could have read or heard that passage without thinking of the prophet Ezekiel's vision of water flowing out of the side of the temple to bring healing and new life to the nations of the world. (*Ezekiel 47.1–6*; cf. *Zechariah 13.1, Rev. 21.6*)

So, as the followers of Jesus burst out the room into Jerusalem, they meet representatives of the whole known world and find that through their bodies, through their tongues, the water of life flows as they speak about God's unshakeable love for all people, and how it can be met today in the body of the risen, living Christ. The body which is present in our lives, through our Baptism and our participation in this act of worship today, where Jesus is present in Most Holy Sacrament of the Altar. Before you leave today, try to take a look at the left-hand side of the sanctuary up here, or the right-hand side of the altar downstairs in the Jerusalem chapel, where Jesus' Body, in the bread of the Eucharist, is kept – and above which a perpetual light burns, a flame.

Over the summer, the PCC will be planning our next few years of mission – deciding how we think God is calling us to burst out of this room into the world to proclaim his love both here in Marylebone and everywhere that St Marylebone people spend our time during the week. Having completed the renovation of this amazing building, how do we want to use our resources in the next phase of our life to show the world how much God loves it. Because we want this to be something that every one of us feels part of, there will be information about this project on the website in the coming weeks, along with opportunities for you to be involved. Please pray for the gift of the Holy Spirit – in each of our lives and in the life of this community – to propel us into the world, bursting with joy.

Amen.

SIRH 8.6.25