

Hymns:     378    “Father of everlasting grace”  
              387    “Into a world of dark”  
              369    “Baptise us with your spirit”  
              404    “God’s spirit is in my heart”

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Reading:    Acts 2:1-22a

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### **“THEY MUST BE DRUNK”**

Wesley’s Chapel opened on November 1<sup>st</sup> 1778. November 1<sup>st</sup>, as many people know, is, “All Saints’ Day”. Naturally, that’s become the date for our Church Anniversary, our Patronal Festival.

Quite right too.

But I’d like to argue for an alternative date. A complementary feast day. And the day I’d choose would, of course, be today – the Festival of Pentecost. Alongside “All Saints’ Day” we could then enjoy “All Nations’ Day”. John Wesley did, after all, declare that he looked upon the whole world as his parish. Take one look at the flags hanging out from the balcony and you’ll see just how appropriate it would be to establish this extra festival. The 55 flags represent the nations from whom we draw our congregation.

If we were to do this we’d have to write a new hymn. Let’s remember the first verse of the hymn we sing on All Saints’ Day:

*For all the saints who from their labours rest,  
Who thee by faith before the world confessed,  
Thy name, O Jesus, be forever blessed;  
Alleluia!*

That’s what we sing on November 1<sup>st</sup>. For all the great men and women of faith who now lie safely in their graves.

But what about this for the saints who are still alive?

*Let all the saints from every nation sing,  
And here at City Road, their gifts and graces bring,  
That with one voice we all may bless our King;  
Alleluia!*

What could be better to illustrate the reach and breadth of our message than such a verse? Or what could do that with more poignancy than the two baptisms that will take place later in the service.

First, there's Alina. She was born, brought up and educated in the "Commonwealth of Virginia" – also known as "The Old Dominion" because it was the very first British colony on the American continent, established in 1607. But that's recent history compared with the existence of the country from which her fiancé originates. Joe hails from Lebanon. Jesus, Paul, Peter all visited the territories to which we now give that name. That's proper history!

And then there's Hamed. He was born in Iran and left when his family were ousted at the time of the overthrow of the Shah. He was raised and educated in London. Interestingly, the Parthian, Medes and Elamites (the first three groups mentioned on the list of those present in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost) were all from country we nowadays call Iran. Hamed will soon marry Bana (alas not able to be with him today) who hails from Jordan. The country to which we now give this name is also a territory known intimately in the biblical narratives.

Hamed brings a rich package to the feast and we honour all that the Muslim faith has given him throughout his life. For this significant moment, he's chosen the name of a Christian saint, the saint whose festival day falls on his (Hamed's) birthday. The saint in question is named Petroc who, with Michael and Piran is the patron saint of Cornwall. I like Petroc – he was, after all, born and grew up in South Wales.

Petroc, with other Celtic saints, provides the perfect answer to the speech made yesterday (and reported today) by the former Mayor of London. He said that all attempts to create a united, federal, Europe have failed. He suggested that the Romans made the best fist of it some 2000 years ago. Napoleon had had a go and so had Hitler. And we all know how their efforts failed.

He might have added the wars of religion in the 17<sup>th</sup> century as the Roman Catholic Church tried to combat nascent Protestantism in order to reassert its command over the whole European continent. I remember as a student addressing the question of the claims of "ultra-modernism" (a desire to command and control a European Church from its headquarters in the Vatican) against what might be called Gallicanism (a more devolved and local expression of the Church related federally with churches in other lands and regions).

Long before these events, it was the Celtic saints who created a sense of Europe. And there was never in their mind the idea of a Church that would depend on control, an imposed uniformity, or a one-size-fits-all model centred on Rome or anywhere else. Petroc travelled to Ireland and Brittany and Rome before he settled in Devon and Cornwall. Within a century of his life, Columbanus (even more remarkably) left Ireland for France and Germany and Switzerland and Italy where he established religious communities and introduced learning and culture on a grand scale. I could make a very long list of other Celtic saints whose contribution towards shaping and developing a European self-awareness could hardly be exaggerated.

These Celtic saints, 1500 years before the modern Roman Catholic Church imagined that they had invented the topic, developed a programme based on two key notions – solidarity and subsidiarity. Solidarity first – the sense that "we're all in this together". We must find a way of integrating our efforts, holding fast to each other for our basic needs, and creating critical mass for our economic, social and

political futures. At the same time, however, we must never forget the notion of subsidiarity. Decisions must be taken as near the level where people will be affected by them as possible. Here we have a formula that balances unity with local responsibility.

I'd like the former Mayor of London to stuff that in his pipe and smoke it.

Well Hamed, Petroc, - what a stream of consciousness that name has triggered in my brain. But back to the point.

We must celebrate our latter-day saints, alive and well and living here in London. Today's baptisms remind us of the diversity which we can legitimately celebrate. A diversity that echoes that which we see in ancient Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost. And we must pray that, now as then, those tongues of fire and those gusts of wind may bring the Spirit of God into the hearts and minds of all of us here. And we must invoke almighty God that just as a diverse congregation in ancient Jerusalem heard and understood everything that was being said as if it was spoken in their own languages, we too in this part of London and on a day like today must hope that we can understand the thrust of the message of God's love and the promise to equip us to speak God's word, in our day and our city. Here and now.

With all this in mind, let me end by recasting some of the verses from the second chapter of the Acts of the Apostles. Here goes:

Now there were present in London, God-fearing people from every nation under heaven. When they came together they were bewildered because each one heard them speaking in his own language. Utterly amazed, they asked: "Are not these preachers from dim and distant Yorkshire and the enchanting Principality of Wales? So how is that each of us hears as if in his own language? They are, are they not, drawn from Iran, Jordan and the Lebanon; from the United States of America; from Romania, Gibraltar, Italy and St Lucia; there are citizens of Ghana and the island state of Fiji; Scots, Irish, and Welsh are here from the Celtic fringes of our nation; and from England too where all these events are taking place. We all hear them declaring the wonders of God as if it's in our own language.

So then, the question is begged, "Are they drunk?"

Are we drunk?

Or could this be the secret potion which, once taken will change the way we see the world forever?

We all belong together. The only future worth having is one that will find a way to cross all the lines that separate us from one another. And that is what Pentecost is all about. That is what today is all about.

Amen