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| Sermon |
| Year C , 1st June 2025 |
| **Sermon…. What? Everyone?!**  Acts 2:1-21  By Mary Cotes  A Baptist Minister living in Milton Keynes  Context: a diverse and ecumenical local congregation  Aim: to enable the congregation to catch the inclusive vision of the Pentecost narrative  What can this mean?’ This is the million-dollar question asked by the crowds who witness the dramatic events at the first Pentecost. Interestingly, they don’t ask for a scientific analysis of the event. Instead, they allow themselves to be caught up into the miracle. But they do want to know its significance.  Did you notice the number of times that the word ‘all’ occurred in the reading? Luke, our author, begins by explaining that Jesus’ followers – the twelve, the mother and brothers of Jesus and a number of women – are ‘ALL’ together in one place. Then, when the Holy Spirit comes upon them, they are ALL filled with the Holy Spirit, each and every one.  God is doing a new thing here! Whereas in times past the Holy Spirit was poured out upon certain appointed individuals, such as the craftsmen Bezalel and Oholiab; or upon prophets like Elijah and Jeremiah; now, on this day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit is poured out on absolutely everybody. Each is given a voice and no-one is excluded. As Peter declares to the crowd, this miracle of inclusivity was foretold by the prophet Joel: in the last days, the Holy Spirit would be poured out on ALL humankind and everyone would prophesy!  Like a strong, driving wind, the Holy Spirit fills not just part of the house, but the whole of it. Here, the word ‘house’ has rich connotations. It’s a kind of throw-forward, a glimpse of things to come. The early churches, founded in the wake of this extraordinary day, would first meet in the houses of believers. So, by telling us that the ‘whole house’ is filled by the Spirit, Luke is first inviting us to understand that the Holy Spirit is poured out on the whole Church.  Yet the significance of the word ‘house’ goes deeper still. Because a ‘house’ in ancient times might well have accommodated numerous men and women: family members from across the generations together with servants and slaves and sometimes employees as well. Luke suggests that the gift of the Holy Spirit is offered not just to one particular group in the Church, but to all, regardless of social status.  Such a radically inclusive vision has the power to overturn all human assumptions of privilege and entitlement. Under the influence of the Spirit, the Church is empowered to be a new kind of open community. As Paul will declare, ‘in Christ, there is no such thing as Jew and Greek, slave and freeman, male and female.’ Traditional hierarchies are challenged, and disparate, diverse people are drawn together and given courage to witness to  the gospel.  But there’s more. Those who speak reach across further boundaries – of geography and language. The crowds come from near and far! A few are dismissive, but for those who truly listen, that little word ‘all’ appears again: they ‘ALL’ hear tell of the great things that God has done, and they are ‘ALL’ amazed. Now, the unpronounceable list that Luke provides of the different nationalities present in the crowd is probably not entirely exhaustive! But the point is this: as the Holy Spirit comes like a wind ‘from heaven,’ so those who receive the message come from every nation ‘under heaven’. We might well imagine how, as Jesus promised, the gospel will spread to the ends of the earth when all these visitors return home from Jerusalem, telling of their experiences.  So: what can this mean for us? Our scripture today affirms not that human beings have to invest in the divine plan, but rather that God has invested in human beings! God promises to empower each one here this morning, and to empower this church, gathered together in this one place. We are included! The Holy Spirit doesn’t speak solely through the church’s leaders, or through those who have attended the most Bible studies. The story of Pentecost reminds us that God speaks and acts powerfully through the likes of you and me, in any place, at any moment, and even when we’re least expecting it.  Equally, we are all challenged to become careful, and not dismissive, listeners. How attentively do we heed the voice of the Holy Spirit speaking through others from every nook and cranny of the church community? As we listen more readily, perhaps we also shall be caught up into the miracle like the crowd at the first Pentecost, and ALL be amazed and transformed as we hear of the great things that God has done.  **Notes:** |