Killin Sermon

This is Pentecost Sunday - the scripture readings are of the promised coming of the Holy Spirit. All sorts of strange things happen - like a rushing wind; like fire. And then there are the tongues, the speaking and the hearing. Sometimes that is seen as reversing of the story of the Tower of Babel in the Book of Genesis. Mankind is getting above himself or maybe herself by building a tower to reach to heaven. So God brings a confusion of language so that efforts to work together will be frustrated.

Now there is a new situation - of energy and power. Now there is a multiplicity of language - but everybody is heard and understood. We sometimes describe this as the beginning of the age of the church. Jesus has been with his disciples – present in flesh and blood - present as the risen Christ. He talks with them and prays with them before his Ascension. He tells them to wait in the city until they are clothed with power from on high. And now it has happened.

So we are in Killin - on Pentecost Sunday. So we ask in what way we can see and express Pentecost in what we do today.

Today the faithful congregation here at Killin joins the Strathearn Group. You might look at that and say, 'just another small congregation becoming part of a bigger group'. You might think economies of scale and efficiency and the church being more business-like. In the past there was a tendency to group congregations as a way of surviving - sharing costs and relieving the pressure. There's sense in that of course but also expediency - expediency because it seems to solve a problem of decline for a time but not in the longer term. For if the underlying question and challenge is about how we sustain an outward facing and missional life and ministry in our congregations - about how we grow rather than decline - then just grouping congregations doesn't actually address it. Actually it facilitates it because it dilutes that sense of the local church being the church where it is.

Killin is becoming linked with the Strathearn Group. Each of the four congregations is distinct, special and, dare I say it, unique. The congregations will work together - in that sense they will be a group. But they will also be a community of individual congregations each ministering and serving in its area. And that's why we are also affirming the ministry team which will support the life of these four congregations - a team which is also diverse, people working together and contributing their individual gifts and talents.

There is one more Pentecost thing which is really important for me. We could get focused on the life of the Killin congregation - and on the Strathearn Group as if nothing beyond that world existed. But that isn't how things are developing here.

When I was a Rector I was fortunate to be part of a large and solid-looking parish. We could have gone on without needing to be involved outside that. But that isn't the Pentecost way - it doesn't recognise that God's spirit is at work everywhere and is in all sorts of people and groups. The Church does not own God.So we got involved - with the local house church and with all sorts of community and voluntary groups. It wasn't always easy - sometimes we had confusion of language - but out of the muddle and confusion we sometimes had extraordinary creativity and all sorts of surprising things which energised and enriched the life of the church and of everybody else involved. And the best of that was the Passion Play – which was nothing to do with the institutional life of the church at all. We provide our share of energy and hope – but we also provide stability and history; we have buildings and people know where we are; and we also provide connection to the church beyond and internationally.

I know that under Paddy's leadership you have been doing the same - building relationships with Christian and other groupings. We don't want to own or to control. We just seek partnership so that we can all be enriched by the Pentecost spirit.

May God bless you in this new start – and may his will be done in all of us