

As I prayed Morning Prayer with some of my colleagues earlier in the week I was struck afresh by the words of Zechariah quoted in the Benedictus:

In the tender compassion of our God the dawn from on high shall break upon us.

Words for such a time as this as we come to celebrate the birth of the Church – Pentecost. When the dawn from on high broke upon a bunch of ordinary folk who were so afraid of what the Jewish leaders might do to them they were cowering behind locked doors.

Are they words for such a time as this as we too cower behind locked doors? It was God's tender compassion for humanity that Jesus came to reveal to the world, with his compassionate interaction with untouchables such as lepers and haemorrhaging women. As he came to comfort his frightened, bereaved disciples he brought with him a challenge: 'Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.' As God the Father sent Jesus to show the compassion of God to a broken world so Jesus commissions his disciples to do likewise.

How compassionate are you I wonder. As I walked around the playing fields yesterday I was reminded of the rich seam of anger bubbling just under my relatively calm exterior. I saw bags of rubbish left by picnickers strewn across the grass and I felt rage and ashamed at the thoughtlessness and sheer lack of care that humanity has both for one another and our world. As I read about the shenanigans of those who purport to govern us I discover I want vengeance... perhaps not so different from behaviour exhibited by the first disciples. Do you remember the story of Jesus passing a Samaritan town being asked not to enter and the sons of thunder – James and John asking – shall we cast fire down from heaven and destroy them?

It was to these firebrands, braggart Peter and the rest of the motley crew of disciples that Jesus came with his challenge. It is to the motley crew that we are that Jesus also comes. The first disciples were not expected to pull themselves up by their sandal straps - Jesus breathed on them and said to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained. Jesus breathed on them and gave them the power of God to be and do what they could not do in their own strength. Jesus says to us too 'Receive the Holy Spirit....' so that we too so we can be and do what God needs us to do to show God's tender compassion to the world we live in today.

The verse from the Benedictus continues:

In the tender compassion of our God the dawn from on high shall break upon us, to shine on those who dwell in darkness and the shadow of death, and to guide our feet into the way of peace.

In some measure we already have received from God the gifts we need to live life in all its fullness, if we feel a lack in this we only have to ask and receive any further gift of the Holy Spirit. But there are people living around us who too are dwelling in darkness and under the shadow of death, but with no understanding of God's tender compassion or gift of the Holy Spirit to help them survive or even thrive. The challenge of Pentecost is that Jesus says to each of us: 'Peace be with you. As

the Father has sent me, so I send you.' Will you allow the peace Jesus offers to reside in you? and allow Jesus to send you as he chooses?

May the tender compassion of our God for you and the rest of our suffering world fill us with God's renewing grace.