

# PENTECOST: TAKING THE CHURCH OUTDOORS



**Theories abound as to why the Christian church grew so quickly in the centuries immediately following Jesus' resurrection. Amongst many interwoven possibilities, three specifically relate to *Thy Kingdom Come*:**

**1. The empowering work of the Holy Spirit** – no growth is possible without God but when God opens a door, the impossible becomes possible;

**2. The boldness of the people of God** – filled with the Spirit, Christians grew in courageous confidence, even amidst and sometimes even because of persecution, knowing God's hope not in human power but weakness, fragility and vulnerability;

**3. The visibility of the difference God makes to the ordinary things of life** – faith was visible in the, often outdoor, meeting places of life, and even when meeting in homes to worship as so many churches did, the lack of glazing meant worship, preaching and testimony to God's transforming power was audible to the rest of the neighbourhood! Christianity embraced the twin theologies of temple and of household, with a faith expressed in yeast and salt, farming and fishing. In a world searching for meaning and genuine transformation amongst triviality, Christianity shone out as the least trivial calling ever.

It is no accident that *Thy Kingdom Come* culminates in the feast of Pentecost, these three strands above run through *Thy Kingdom Come*, like writing through a stick of rock.

So, how do we encourage our gathered worship on Pentecost Sunday to fully embrace these three strands and might the unwelcome challenges of Covid maybe even allow us to embrace all three in even deeper ways?

Pentecost is the festival of faith breaking down the doors of fear and hiddenness and moving outdoors. It was in the streets not the temples where the first followers of Jesus, empowered by his Spirit, testified to God's love and calling, and in ways that each person could receive. One way to reflect this is to move our gathered worship outdoors, to take the step of faith which the first disciples needed to.

Common Worship (Times and Seasons) gives a range of excellent liturgical resources to help us. A range of supporting resources from partner organisations like Messy Church are easily sourced online. *Thy Kingdom Come* has prepared a special Pentecost service based on approved liturgy with space to reflect on the themes and callings of Pentecost and *Thy Kingdom Come*. A copy can be downloaded for local adaptation:

But as well as considering what, maybe we might take a lesson from the Christenings Project on how, who, when interviewing people on what was most memorable or important in the Christening service found church leaders reflecting on specific wording and families of those being Christened recalling the height from which the water was poured, or the imagery of light. Sometimes the how is as important as the what.

At Pentecost we are reminded that Jesus uses imagery to convey the fullness of the Kingdom of God which cannot be contained in words alone. The symbolism of wind and fire, the emotion of watching, waiting and joyful fulfilment, the power of personal testimony. Each community is different so each church will have its own way of reflecting this symbolism, emotion and story, and there are a wide range of *Thy Kingdom* resources to help, but why not take the church outdoors as one way of embodying the three strands above, looking at each aspect of the service through the eyes of one who knows nothing of our story and culture and asking how it best connects (so that people only need make one conversion: to Christ, not one to Christ and one to church culture).

And then after planning, why not look at each aspect of the service and ask, **is it daring enough?**

How could we go up one more gas mark on expecting the empowering of the Spirit, living out a bold faith and being visible to the wider community?