

Sunday Evening Service 22nd April 2012, Kenneth Gray – Acts 2:14-41 ‘We are all witnesses of the fact’

It is Pentecost Day and we find Peter delivering the first sermon after the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus.

Kenneth, in his talk on this familiar passage, encouraged us to consider types of challenges and opportunities we have faced in our lives. For some there may have been occasions that have called for spontaneous action, an impetuous response to a life-or-death situation such as snatching a child to safety when it has wandered on to a busy road. For others, another type of challenge might have been the requirement, say, to deliver a speech when unaccustomed to public speaking – taking us far out of our comfort zone. Then there’s the type of challenge that requires us to risk the disapproval, perhaps even the violent reaction of others when we find ourselves required to deliver unwelcome news or to correct a misapprehension.

Peter had faced all three types of challenge. He had demonstrated that impetuosity of response on several occasions, for example bounding forward to cut off the ear of the high priest’s servant in Gethsemane. But he had failed, three times over, to meet the challenge of admitting he was a disciple of Jesus. Now we find him faced with the opportunity and the undoubted challenge of responding to the murmuring crowd of unbelievers who were discounting, as drunken rambling, the apostles’ speaking in tongues.

Peter was not an orator, he was a fisherman. But this is post-resurrection Peter who has been transformed by the Holy Spirit. What a transformation – and what a sermon! Without the benefit of a university education, without access to erudite commentaries, without a sheaf of previously compiled notes he speaks with the conviction and persuasiveness that only comes from knowing Jesus and recognising the Truth revealed by the Spirit.

He declares: *‘God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of it. Exalted to the right hand of God, he has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and has poured out what you now see and hear’.*

Peter, backed up by the presence of the other apostles, speaks candidly and convincingly and the truthfulness of his message is recognised by the crowd. Clearly it would have been too risky to have tried to deceive the crowd –people are usually familiar with what lying looks like. They hear Peter and believe him such that they are *‘cut to the heart’* and beg to be told what to do to be saved. If Jesus had not been raised from the dead Peter would never have been able to stand there that Pentecost day and preach so compellingly and transform the hearts, minds and lives of the three thousand people present.

With his first sermon Peter rose to the challenge and achieved, through the Holy Spirit, the outcome that every minister of the gospel desires – his hearers asked ‘what shall we do?’ This is what our churches must become – places where people are confronted with the risen Christ and are told unequivocally what they must do to be saved.