

## WHITSUN

In my adopted home of Brighton, Whitsun, aka Pentecost aka Spring Bank Holiday, marks a big change. If the spring weather is at all promising, thousands of Londoners pour out of the railway station and down the hill in search of donkey rides, ice cream, fish and chips and (if the weather is really kind) a toe in the water. Whitsun marks the end of Spring and the promise of warmer times.

Acts 2 1-13 marks a similar watershed, describing as it does the events of Shabuoth, the Jewish wheat and barley harvest festival. 'Pentecost' is Greek for 'Easter plus 50 days'.

The events described are quite graphic, and are probably designed to speak to Luke's Jewish audience, coming as they do on a harvest festival. The Twelve are first to receive the sound of wind, and the tongues of fire, but events move quickly. The narrative switches to many 'devout men from every nation under heaven', who also begin to speak in tongues, to the point where onlookers think they are drunk.

It is more than likely though that the reference to about 15 different languages is in fact a reference to geography as well as language, for the 15 places account for much of the wider East Mediterranean, and parts of the Middle East. For many modern readers then, this Acts passage foretells the time when the Jesus Movement ceases to be a wholly Jewish affair, and takes on a wider potential. For instance, some of the 15 locations are destined to host St Paul on his travels, and/or to receive letters from him. Pentecost is many things, but it must at least mark the beginning of the geographical spread that washed up in our own Bay of Islands 18 centuries later.

For us at St Peter's, Verses 14 to 42 show our Patron Saint finding his feet as a communicator, no longer the Denier, no longer just the Sword-wielder, but now the Rock on which the Church is to be built. And that Church will be a global one. Pentecost is about a lot more than speaking in tongues, or rushes of wind. It is about the harvest of souls 50 days after Easter.

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