

The doors are locked.

That is where John's Holy Spirit story begins.

The disciples are hiding behind closed doors, paralysed by fear. The crucifixion has shattered their confidence. Their future feels uncertain. The world outside appears hostile and dangerous. They are not brave apostles yet. They are frightened people trying to protect themselves from pain and disappointment.

And into that locked room Jesus comes.

Not with anger.

Not with disappointment.

Not with demands.

But with peace.

“Peace be with you.”

Then he breathes on them and says, “Receive the Holy Spirit.”

John's Gospel gives us a Pentecost that is intimate and quiet compared with the dramatic scenes in Acts. There is no rushing wind, no tongues of fire, no crowds gathered from every nation. Just frightened disciples in a locked room and the breath of Christ filling the silence.

And perhaps that matters, because many of us know what it is like to live behind locked doors.

Not physical doors, necessarily, but the inner doors we close against fear, grief, exhaustion, anxiety, resentment, or disappointment. There are parts of ourselves we keep sealed off because the world feels too uncertain or too painful. Pentecost begins precisely there — not with human confidence, but with divine presence.

The Spirit comes not as a reward for courage, but as God's gift to fearful people.

I remember a time in a previous vocation where I found myself working closely with someone whose personality, leadership style, and instincts were profoundly different from mine. We approached problems differently. We communicated differently. We understood what we were trying to do differently. And slowly, tension crept in between us.

At first, I told myself the problem was simply that they were difficult. But beneath that frustration was something harder to admit: fear.

Fear that they might be right and I might be wrong.

Fear that my own instincts might not be enough.

Fear that my way of leading or seeing things was being challenged.

And when human beings feel afraid, our instinct is often to fight. To defend ourselves. To harden our position. To gather evidence for why we are right. Conflict can become less about truth and more about self-protection.

Looking back now, I can see how easy it would have been for both of us to retreat behind locked doors — doors of pride, certainty, resentment, or suspicion. Well, actually, that's precisely what we didbecause that's human and normal!

But over time, something else began to happen. Not suddenly. Not dramatically. But gradually, through difficult conversations, prayer, listening, frustration, patience, and grace, I began to realise that the Spirit had given this person gifts I did not possess. They could see risks I overlooked. They could ask questions I avoided. Their strengths exposed some of my weaknesses, just as my gifts complemented theirs.

It did not mean we suddenly agreed about everything. But it did mean I slowly stopped seeing difference as threat. And other's gifts as a deficit in me.

And perhaps that is one of Pentecost's deepest miracles.

Because when we turn to Acts, the Spirit arrives like wind and fire among people from every nation under heaven. Yet the miracle is not that everyone becomes identical. The crowd does not suddenly all speak the same language. Instead, each hears the Gospel in their own tongue.

Unity without uniformity.

The Spirit does not erase difference; the Spirit enables communion across difference.

That is exactly what Paul is trying to teach the Corinthians. The Church is one body with many gifts. Different gifts. Sometimes uncomfortable gifts. Gifts we may not always understand or even like at first. But all given by the same Spirit.

And perhaps one of the hardest spiritual disciplines is accepting that the Holy Spirit may genuinely work through people who unsettle us.

People whose personalities clash with ours.

People whose perspectives challenge ours.

People who reveal our blind spots.

People we instinctively resist.

Because the Spirit's goal is not to make us comfortable. The Spirit's goal is to make us whole.

The Corinthian church struggled with rivalry and competition because they ranked gifts according to status and visibility. But Paul insists that no member of the body can say to another, "I have no need of you."

That is difficult.

Because sometimes the people we most want to avoid are precisely the people through whom the Spirit is trying to teach us humility, patience, courage, or grace.

And this matters because we live in a world increasingly shaped by division and fear. We are constantly encouraged to retreat into tribes of sameness, where everyone thinks like us, votes like us, speaks like us, and confirms our assumptions. Difference quickly becomes danger.

But Pentecost tells another story.

The Spirit pushes open locked doors.

The Spirit teaches fearful people how to remain in relationship across difference.

The Spirit creates communities where diversity becomes gift rather than threat.

And notice that in John's Gospel the first gift of the Spirit is peace, and the second is forgiveness.

The Spirit creates a forgiving community.

Not because conflict disappears, but because love becomes more important than winning.

The disciples do not receive the Spirit because they are fearless. They receive the Spirit because they are afraid. Pentecost is not the celebration of human competence. It is the celebration of divine presence among fragile people.

And that means there is hope for us too.

Hope for churches navigating disagreement.

Hope for relationships strained by misunderstanding.

Hope for communities struggling with division.

Hope for all the places where fear tempts us to fight rather than listen.

Because the same Spirit who opened the locked room still moves among God's people now.

Still breathing peace into anxious hearts.

Still teaching us to hear one another.

Still drawing different people into one body.

Still reminding us that no one possesses the whole truth alone.

The miracle of Pentecost is not that human differences disappear.

It is that the Spirit makes love stronger than fear