

Words have power. If the Archbishop of Canterbury didn't know that before he guest edited the New Statesman on Thursday, (and I think he did), then he does now. I'm tempted to reflect a little on the nature of communication in the electronic age, and the way a statement can be around the world in fractions of a second, but I think the underlying truth is that it's always been the case that something worth listening to has been gossiped about and circulated. People were saying much the same thing about the printed word 500 years ago. Only the timings have changed. When words hit home, people listen. When words and lives tell the same story then people are transformed. That's the story of the first Pentecost, and we are part of that transformation.

Think about it. A gathering of frightened people, whose leader had been killed because of a plot between the Jewish authorities and the Romans, who might well be next for execution themselves, suddenly became a fearless group of street evangelists who were prepared to die for their Lord. On a world stage – Jews from across the world were supposed to make it to Jerusalem for one of the three great festivals – a story which will transform the world starts its life in a bunch of frightened frail people who don't quite know what they are waiting for.

And it gets more amazing than that. The same power which transformed the disciples has transformed people like us down the ages to keep the story of Christ at the forefront of the world's agenda, and to proclaim good news. The Archbishop's words this week are a small part of that. The story we tell, in word and action, is part of it too.

This is some power and it is worth celebrating.

I want to think today about how this power from the Holy Spirit – the energy, the breath of God, can be at work in our lives and in our churches and communities today. The story from Acts 2 gives us some clues.

Firstly: what comes together to make power happen?

Power happens when we are together – Jesus's followers were together in one place. This is just as true now – today is a day when Christians lay aside their differences and worship together, as we'll see in the Global Day of Prayer even here and across the world.

Power happens when we know our need, wait and ask. Jesus's followers were told in Luke and Acts to wait, and later in Acts 1 they are described as 'constantly devoting themselves to prayer'

Power happens when we focus on Jesus. In Acts 1:15 the believers are 120 people, only united by what they have experienced and by their relationship to Christ.

In none of this am I saying that we can make God do things- for the Spirit blows where the Spirit wills. But stories of revival and great deeds down the years of the church are often based on the united vision of a group of people, sacrificial prayer, and a focus on God as seen in commitment and study. This is hard work, and does not happen by turning up once a week for an hour or so.

Secondly: What is power for?

The proclamation of Good News: forgiveness (Luke 24: 47 – forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed to all nations), reconciliation between God and humanity (Acts 2: 38 – repentance and faith and the

gift of the Holy Spirit are all of a piece); to be witnesses (Acts 1. 8) and tell and be the story of Jesus, not just here but outside too. Pentecost starts in a room and continues in the market place and ends up across the world.

Some of us may be quite pleased with what we've got and don't want to be too disturbed. Well – some of the Spirit's work is to comfort and heal and reassure. But if we are comfortable the Spirit will disturb us. Pentecost challenges the church to ask why we keep this good news in, and have such nice services, when out there are people from every nation under heaven. We have something worth listening to, a powerful story, and words which will transform the world.

In the words of a prayer from Holy Communion: 'May we whom the Spirit lights bring light to the world'. Amen.