

Installation of Canon Eric Aidoo

Pentecost 2025

Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem and each one heard in the native language of each. Amazed and astonished they asked are not these who are speaking Galileans? Note the superciliousness.

And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language? And the list which is the bane of all those who have to read it in public worship Parthians Medes Elamites and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia Egypt and the parts of Libia belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Roam and Cretans and Arabs... in their own languages we heard them speaking about God's deeds of power?

But this afternoon's readings give us a different context...

From Exodus: *The Lord used to speak to Moses face to face as one speaks to a friend.* That relationship which was the foundation of the people of Israel. And of its glory. But it had its limitations. Moses asked to see God's glory, but that could not be done. It would have destroyed Moses.

*The Lord used to speak...*a phrase which is perhaps at the heart of this day, the Jewish festival of Pentecost on which those gathered from every nation under heaven heard the words that Peter said each in their own language.

The events of that day, the signs of Wind and Fire which had signified the presence of God since the wilderness wanderings, the presence of God which judges and redirects and transforms, was clear. It was not only Peter, but all the followers of Jesus, who met the Lord that day, and saw his glory. No longer one patriarchal leader but a motley group of followers, including Peter was had previously in words blustered his boldness and then acted as a coward, who had used his Galilean inflected words to deny who he was and whom he served, now not just Peter but all his companions were speaking as God gave them the words.

Here is a moment where signs and wonders **and words** (as in Genesis) convey transformation This is God touching, taking hold of tongue and voice, body and mind, soul and spirit. Here is power that is unprecedented, unanticipated, perhaps even unwanted. It takes us back to that moment when Mary experiences

the overshadowing of the Holy Spirit and that previous moment when God and humanity are joined. That is what the Spirit does. It joins us to God and to each other. The followers of Jesus are now connected in the way that joins them in the most intimate of ways, of voice, memory, sound, body, place.

The Lord used to speak... And on that day in Jerusalem Peter spoke, from scripture and the prophet Joel, of signs and wonders and visions and dreams. Of judgement and justice. These uncomfortable words of the past are words which create, in Peter's speaking, a new future.

The Lord used to speak... And I speak on the day Pastor Eric Aidoo joins our Ecumenical Canons. Eric has, for many years in our city, represented Pentecostal tradition, a tradition, a way of being church which celebrates and lives out the reality of the grace of God not just in our past but in our present. The Pentecostal way of being church offers overtly the possibility indeed the expectation that every person can be a place where God's glory is made real.

To those of us from traditions which often segregate the spiritual and the intellectual, the feeling and the thinking, the Pentecostal churches of this city have reminded us of the power of God who both judges and saves, and who as the second lesson reminded us, enables each of us to be transformed from one degree of glory to another. The Pentecostal churches have through worship and mutual love proclaimed a joyful hope despite the adversity of individual members or of the community. That joy in Christ's real presence, of the Spirit's active joining with us, is a continued reminder of what other churches, including sometimes my own have lost. Through our sisters and brothers, *we do hear of God's deeds of power.*

And Pastor Eric has brought that way of being church into the heart of our ecumenical way of being. We have been blessed through him and have learnt to reflect on how easy it can be to move far from the tent of meeting, to push the Holy Spirit to the margins.

Today is a day of rejoicing at that corrective. It must also be a day when our reality is checked, and our spiritual heritage rebalanced. It must also be a day for repair. Way back, as the book of Genesis relates in the story of the building of the tower of Babel, the human race spoke one language, but then in sin that one race and culture divided.

Now on the particular Pentecost reported by Luke and through the presence and boldness of those who had followed Jesus from cross to tomb and tomb to resurrection encounters, everyone heard in the own language of the glory of God. Cultural and racial barriers were transcended and all could be one again.

This is the day where once again, and despite the terrible fractures of our world, we are reminded of that hope. Though we are reminded too of the way in which speaking and language have, both within the world and within the church of God, been used not to draw together, but to alienate and disempower. The missionaries from the churches this land through the centuries have often (though not always) linked their proclamation of the gospel inextricably to the use of particular language. Those they encountered were told that their language was inferior, and it was English which must be learnt and used.

I have had my own recent experience of this, working across the Anglican church on Safe Church, ensuring a culture of safety for those who are at risk because they have less power than others. The need for interpretation not just of words but of the cultural concepts the words signify has been a crucial part of our work. Amongst those I work with is Bishop Festus of Ghana, Pastor Eric's birthplace. Bishop Festus spoke courageously of the demands which working constantly in a second or third language make, but also of the need for us to continue to work in English as it draws us together. That, for him is a fruit of the spirit.

Pastor, now Canon Eric has lived among us as one with a facility with language, and generosity in his use of language. He carried the work of the churches in this city through the testing times of Covid and Colston. He has led us as Christians in a language which is not his mother tongue. I hope and pray that he will enable the company of Canons to learn something of his heritage and language so that the mind and heart of this cathedral may be broadened in discovering the length and breadth and height and depth of the grace and love of God given to all people.

Parthians Medes Elamites and residents of Mesopotamia, all of us heard Protestant and Catholic, Methodist and Baptist, Salvationist and Presbyterian. We give thanks that we have heard the powerful deeds of God. For that and for Canon Eric Aidoo we give thanks to God.