



Pastor's Page

"Band of witnesses"

It was always hot on Whit Sunday as we headed off to church, my brother, sister and I wearing those new "itchy clothes!" Our Grandparents would cross our palms with silver at the site of our splendid new outfits (stiff, white shirts and squeaky sandals!) But all of this paled into insignificance for me in the light of the main event. Hundreds of people lined the streets, many taking part in the procession and others just watching. Each church had its own huge banner held aloft by strong men in Sunday shirts; and young girls wearing fancy bonnets clasped the long bright ribbons flowing from it. Mums in posh hats lined up behind their pushchairs as the uniformed groups prepared for action. Then the Boys Brigade officer shouted those immortal words, "COMPANY, BY THE LEFT, QUICK MARCH" Immediately a contingent of military snare drums sprang into life piercing the afternoon air with their explosive anthem announcing to the town, that the parade had begun! Forget the itchy clothes and the squeaky sandals; I was now a soldier, marching for Jesus. Make no mistake about it, this was a special day, this was Whit Sunday and I held my head high as we went on our walk of witness.

I look back with nostalgia but also amazement at what we were attempting on those walks. I didn't realise then, but those processions were making a bold statement to the neighbourhood about the church. In some small measure we were re-enacting the events of the Day of Pentecost 2000 years ago when the Holy Spirit came and the church was born. Before Jesus returned to his Father in heaven he commanded his disciples to stay in Jerusalem and wait for the promised gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:4-5) Jesus knew that they couldn't fulfil the awesome task of witnessing to the ends of the earth without the Holy Spirit's enabling. So as the disciples (120 of them) waited, they prepared for the task firstly by choosing a new team member to replace Judas and also by praying fervently about their mission (Acts 1:12-26). Then when the day of Pentecost came, Luke tells us they were all together in one place when they heard a sound like the blowing of a mighty wind from heaven filling the whole house. And they saw something like tongues of fire resting on each one of them, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and began to speak in other languages as the Spirit enabled them. Not surprisingly this caused quite a stir in Jerusalem, so much so that Peter had to stand up and explain what was happening. Using this God-given opportunity the apostle spoke powerfully to the crowd about the crucified and risen Lord Jesus Christ, calling on his hearers to repent and be baptised in His name for the forgiveness of their sins. The bible says that as a result, about 3,000 people accepted the message were baptised and became part of the church. What a day!

So that's how it all began, and I believe this is how God intends it to carry on. The only difference being that it is now us and not the early disciples who are the witnesses. And like those first believers we desperately need the Holy Spirit, God's promised gift, to help us. We may not march behind a uniformed band on Whit Sunday but we are still called to declare to the world that Jesus Christ is Lord and to march to his drum beat.....squeaky sandals or not!

11th May 2008