

WEEKLY SERMON

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Sharing and witnessing to the Good News of Jesus Christ

This coming Sunday, 19 May is Pentecost, the day when Christians throughout the world celebrate the coming of the Holy Spirit to the disciples.

The old English name for Pentecost was Whit Sunday which is thought to have taken its name from the white garments worn by those who were traditionally baptised on that day.

The day following Whit Sunday, or Whitsun as it was often abbreviated to, was, of course, Whit Monday.

Whit Monday was observed as a bank holiday in England for many years, and as the date of Whitsun is dependent on the date of Easter, so the bank holiday moved dates, in the same way as the Easter Bank holiday date changes each year.

On Whit Monday churches often held their Whit Walks, a procession around the town or village led by the clergy of the parish, followed by the parishioners in their Sunday Best, children carrying their flower baskets, and the men of the parish carrying the huge banners with the name of the church or Bible verses emblazoned on them.

No procession was complete without the local band playing hymn tunes as the walk progressed towards the church, where invariably it ended with a rousing rendition of the hymn 'The church's one foundation is Jesus Christ our Lord'.

Whit Monday was replaced as a bank holiday with the fixed Spring Bank Holiday so it now rarely coincides with Pentecost, as this year. However, you can still see the equivalent of Whit walks in many parts of Lancashire, with history dating back hundreds of years, on various dates in late spring and early summer.

People still gather to bear witness to their faith, and many gather in the roadsides to watch the spectacle. These Processions of Witness are an opportunity for the churches to proclaim the Christian faith to the community, as well as bringing people together, for fun and fellowship.

When the Holy Spirit came upon the disciples at the first Pentecost they were empowered to share the good news of Jesus to all people, to tell the story of Jesus' life, death and resurrection, and the salvation which that faith brings.

Christians today are still sharing the same story. Not as a dull retelling of the past, but as a vibrant living story of today, a story of the Holy Spirit still working in the hearts and minds of people here and now, of growing new disciples and lighting beacons of hope shining into communities across Lancashire. Watch out and listen for the story, you may find yourself transformed.

Rev Carole Garner, Associate Priest, Parish of Oswaldtwistle

HEALTHY CHURCHES TRANSFORMING COMMUNITIES