

Look again

William Hepper *reflects on* John 20:19-end

The New Testament story is often presented like this: Jesus lived, died and rose again, then ascended to heaven, after which the Holy Spirit came on the Church at Pentecost with rushing wind and tongues of fire.

That's the picture from Luke and Acts, at any rate. John does things differently.

Of course Jesus' life and death come first, but then comes this short passage, full of words of peace and such a laid-back feel you could miss it altogether. But look again at the quiet drama, as the risen Jesus appears in the locked room. The wounds on his hands and side, by which he identifies himself, take us right back to the trauma of the cross. Look again, as Jesus tells the disciples, who are huddled in fear behind locked doors, that he is sending them out as he himself was sent out by God the Father.

Hmmm... not so laid back, then.

And there's more, as Jesus says, "Receive the Holy Spirit." But we hear no rushing wind nor do we see tongues of fire; only Jesus' own breath is breathed on them, the breath of God, the same life-giving breath that God breathed in the creation story. So John in his inimitable way ties together Jesus' woundedness and the coming of God's mighty Spirit, the creation of the world, the commissioning of the disciples as evangelists and the forgiveness of sins.

By all means revel in the excitement of Pentecost, Acts-style, but balance it with the quiet but profound insights of the Gospel of John. 🌸

Holy God, this Pentecost breathe on us the breath of your Holy Spirit. Amen.

Dreaming dreams

by Victoria Scholes

Dreams sparkle throughout the Bible: the Promised Land; the kingdom of God; the city of Jerusalem. These dreams are meant to become real, and we have a part in making them so.

That's no small thing – it takes courage to risk destroying the dream in order to make it a reality. Perhaps this is why when Moses sent spies to check out the Promised Land (Numbers 13), only Caleb had the courage

to urge them to make that dream come true.

Christians have a call to dream dreams, to try to make them into reality – whether they be for a world where no one is starving or without a home – or whether they involve a more personal vision, such as turning a hobby into a career. It is a risky business – there are, truly, things to be won or lost. But it is the nature of our faith to task risks, and one of those risks is that our dreams will come true.

Let's pray for the courage to make it so. 🌸



The books of the Old Testament

Ruth

by Gillian Cooper

Ruth leaves her people, and her own faith, to ally herself with her mother-in-law. It is a classically beautiful story, which makes us afraid and hopeful by turns. It is a woman's story, of women in a man's world finding a place for themselves, showing what is possible when women work together.

But this book is also Israel's book. Many families might have found themselves in similar circumstances, but this family is special. We do not know

why until we reach the small genealogy at the end. Ruth's son, it turns out, is King David's grandfather.

So this charming story has a sting in its tail. The great King David has a foreigner for a great-grandmother. Although the story is set "in the days of the judges", many scholars believe it to have been written much later, at a time when, as described in Ezra 10, Israelite men were compelled to give up their foreign wives. Perhaps this book resists that policy; without this particular foreign wife, there would have been no King David. 🌸

“Dominion belongs to the Lord, and he rules over the nations.”

Psalm 22:28