

**Get up and go**

*Psalm 104:24-30; Acts 2:1-21*

Florence Foster Jenkins, is a film about an American socialite, a patroness of the arts, who decided that not only did she love music, but that she wanted to sing. She took lessons. It is said that while riding in a taxi that collided with another car, Jenkins let out a scream. She then discovered that she could sing "a higher F than ever before", and sent the cab driver a box of expensive cigars.

Hers is a moving story of courage. Despite illness she was determined to pursue her dream. She hired the Carnegie Hall in New York and gave a concert, giving away 1,000 or so tickets to war veterans who laughed at her idiosyncratic performance, but were encouraged and uplifted by her determination to give it a go. Florence Foster Jenkins is reputed to have said, "People may say I can't sing. But no one can ever say I didn't sing." There's someone who showed a little va-va-voom! There's someone who showed get up and go.

Pentecost, the feast of the Holy Spirit, is the day when we should be celebrating the time when God confirmed the gift of 'get up and go' to the whole Church. "A dishevelled and mournful band of eleven gathered in the home of one of the disciples. They came together as the group with whom Jesus had had intimate times; this is the group who lived every day with Jesus...Although they were dispersed, they decided to gather early in the morning to worship."<sup>i</sup> A tired, confused, dispirited, frightened group. Still in fear for their lives. Still not sure what to make sense of what had happened a few weeks before.

Then it happened. A noise so loud it could not be ignored. The Holy Spirit came, just as Jesus had promised. From being a nervous, weak body of individuals, these followers were inspired in ways that are hard to explain, to get up and go.

Luke begins his gospel with the birth of Jesus. He begins Acts with the birth of the Church. Jesus is born into the world to save it. The Holy Spirit is born into the Church to inspire it. The disciples, the people around them, were filled with the Holy Spirit. Not one was excluded. No

human being could engineer the “vivacity of the coming of the Holy Spirit sent by the awesome God of Jesus Christ.”<sup>ii</sup>

‘Vivacity’ – there’s a great word. It’s a noun that means to be characterised by high spirits and animation. It’s seen as a generally good thing – to think of someone who is vivacious, alive, bright, sparkling.

When the Holy Spirit came, those leaden, dull, dispirited followers of Jesus became vivacious. They were animated; they were filled with high spirits, they sparkled. It would mean, if they were to remain true to the inspiration, that they would have get up and go, and tell the good news around the world.

Peter had get up and go: he went to Joppa, he welcomed Cornelius and others who were not Jewish, into the Christian fold. Paul had get up and go: he went to Athens and Rome, and brought women and men into the Christian fold.

Thomas, it is rumoured, got as far as India with his get up and go. Andrew and Matthew, it is said, got as far as the Caspian Sea with their get up and go, with Andrew possibly going on to Ukraine, Russia and Greece. James’ get up and go may have taken him to Spain. Jude and Bartholomew to Armenia. Philip’s get up and go led him to preach the gospel in Greece, Syria, and western Turkey.

These are only the named ones, when the Holy Spirit comes, people get up and go. And they go not empty handed and without words. They go carrying and speaking the good news. They talk it and show it to people they meet. No great plan; no massively thought out scheme; they get up and go where they can, when they can, and mile by mile, language by language, soul by soul, the good news of Jesus spread around the world.

The Spirit of God, first read about in the Book of Genesis in the poetic act of creation, blowing through the unformed universe blows still on the Day of Pentecost. God’s Word was still creating. Creating people with visions and dreams and a desire to act for the good and be a blessing to the world and show through kindness and generosity Whose Spirit moved them. When the Holy Spirit comes into the world, and into the Church, we are meant to get up and go!

Now, let's be honest, there are times when we find ourselves in a time of life when we feel that our get up and go has got up and went. The mornings when it is hard to emerge from the bedclothes. The afternoons when it is hard to keep going. The evenings when you want to call it a day but there is still too much to do. The in-tray that never seems to empty. The emails that pile in one after another. The volunteers that never emerge to lend a hand so you are left doing it all by yourself. The depression that blankets your dreams in grey. The illness that whittles away at your hopes with pain. The bereavement that darkens each day with clouds. The tiredness that drains your life of colour.

I have news for you: good news. The Holy Spirit is here. The day of Pentecost occurred just seven weeks after those who were opposed to Jesus had ended this 'nonsense' with crucifixion. But instead of nailing Him to a cross forever; instead of burying Him in a tomb forever; instead of confining Him to the footnotes of history forever, somehow, wondrously, miraculously, astonishingly, the Spirit of God moved, and those men and women who had been frozen by fear, and gutted by grief were galvanised into action. They get up and go.

This is sheer, spiritual, poetry. "No flat, prosaic explanation can do justice to the truth of how the Church came into being and how the once timid disciples found their tongues to proclaim the truth of Christ."<sup>iii</sup> They were stirred, they were shaken, they were moved, they were inspired; and things began to happen.

I like that. I like the fact that through the intimacy of Christmas, and the brokenness of Good Friday and the bewilderment of Easter Sunday, God's creative, disturbing, glorious Spirit sweeps through the disillusioned disciples and transforms them into apostles, commissioned to live and teach the Jesus story. Were they perfect? Far from it. Were they always successful? Certainly not. Were they immune to future doubts and uncertainty and fear? Of course not. But did they get up and go. You bet your life they did.

So must we. God's love has erupted into the world. Fire that burns away the corrosion of inequality and injustice. Water that washes away repetitive sin. And a mighty wind that blows

through all that is fusty and rickety and shakes the foundations of the world, and God's Church, again and again.

Does it still happen now? In May 2012 the Church of Scotland established the 'Go for it' fund. It's all about funding change in church and community. The Fund aims to encourage creative ways of working, which develop the life and mission of the local church, and is transformative for both communities and congregations.

The Ayr Ark is an Ayr based project providing an alcohol-free Youth nightclub, engaging with young people on the streets and through weekend events, and working in partnership with local schools. The St Rollox community outreach is a Glasgow based project supporting those who are isolated and on low incomes, from single parents to Asylum Seekers. They provide a Food Co-op, Charity Shop, Citizens Advice Surgery, and a Café. In Wester Hailes, the Edinburgh based project is providing a free debt counselling service and one to one support; working with each client until they become debt free, and teaching budgeting skills.

There is get up and go in the Church of Scotland, and in other churches across the world. Why? Because the Spirit of God is still burning, and watering and blowing and inspiring God's people today. I believe in a Church, I believe in people of the Church, who have get up and go. Who find themselves moved and inspired and challenged, even irritated, by the restless blowing of God's Spirit through their hearts and souls. Who see things that need being done and instead of sitting back waiting for others to do it, get up and do it themselves. Who hear the lamentations of tired people and decide that things won't change unless they get up and make an effort themselves. Who look at the injustice, and the hunger, and the homelessness, and the fearfulness, and the loneliness, and make up their minds that, even in the smallest of ways, they are going to get up and do what they can about it.

Desmond Tutu tells about a church in Rome that has a statue of Christ without arms. When you ask why, you are told that it shows how God relies on us, God's human partners, to get up and do His work for Him. Without us, God has no eyes; without us, God has no ears; without us, God has no arms; without us, God has no feet.

God's Spirit comes to His Church to enable us to get up and go. He's doing it right now, for there are things you could be doing for God, and maybe already are doing for God, right now. The Holy Spirit is the power which enables the Church to 'go public' with its good news, to attract a crowd, to be a breath of life, and to a hope to the weary world. The Holy Spirit, God's get up and go, for you, for me, for all.

**In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.**

**Amen**

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<sup>i</sup> Linda E Thomas, Feasting on the Word, Year C Vol 3, p14

<sup>ii</sup> ibid p16

<sup>iii</sup> William Willimon, Acts, p29