

Be pneumatic

Never use a two syllable word if you can find a five-syllable one that will do - that has been the charge levelled at experts in all sorts of fields. We all have our favourite sayings - rodent operatives for the rat man, baggage-handling service engineers for porters and so on. Theologians are no different. If you start looking at the theology of today - Pentecost, you find that the experts like to talk about pneumatology - it comes from the Greek word *pneuma*, which means spirit, or breath or wind.

Well, that got me thinking. Pneumatology is probably not a word that has crossed your lips very often - but pneumatic has. So I wondered what we might glean from thinking simply in that version of the word.

We all know, for example, about **pneumatic tyres**. They were patented - for horse-drawn carriages - by a man called Robert Thompson in 1845, but didn't catch on. Then in 1888 a man whose name we all know - John Boyd Dunlop - patented a similar device for bicycles. The French company Michelin applied it to motor vehicles - and we know the rest. Pneumatic tyres make for a smoother journey - they iron out the bumps, and enable us to get where we need to be in relative comfort. Doesn't that remind you of one of the names Jesus gives to the Holy Spirit, when he promises to his disciples that he will not leave them without help. He calls him the Helper, the Comforter. Real comfort comes in not being alone. There is nothing more awful than loneliness - not *being alone* that can be fine. But we can be lonely in a crowd. Loneliness, isolation, feeling we don't belong, feeling abandoned: those are awful feelings, and we have all experienced them to some degree. The disciples might have felt that after Jesus left them. But they were promised his presence. They would never be alone. 'I will be with you always, to the end of time' - the words of Jesus with which Matthew finishes his Gospel. And through the centuries, Christians have been aware of that presence, and therefore of the comfort, the Peace and the strength the Holy Spirit brings. Like the pneumatic tyre, it is not a guarantee against there being bumps. But the Holy Spirit enables us to cope with those bumps in a much better way.

Then I guess we are all very aware of the **pneumatic drill**. It is one of those things you can hardly *not* be aware of, if it is being used near you. It is noisy and intrusive - but amazingly powerful. The concrete road is strong enough to carry the weight of a huge tanker, but easily falls victim to the pneumatic drill. Do you remember those words of Ezekiel - a idea which occurs several times in the Old Testament 'I will remove the heart of stone from your body and give you a heart of flesh. I shall put my spirit within you and make you conform to my statutes.' The Holy Spirit is the powerful means by which God can and does change us. The hard-heartedness we have may be in terms of our attitudes, or our unwillingness to put God first - it can manifest itself in all sorts of ways. But people can and do change. But the truth is that it is God who does the changing. All we have to do is let him. And there is no-one who can say - 'I'm too tough a nut to crack' the power of the Holy Spirit to change people radically has been shown in

the story of so many people - from St Paul on the road to Damascus onwards. The power of the pneumatic drill reminds us of what amazing change the Holy Spirit can bring to any one of us.

The third use of the word is something much more homely. I remember when our children were small Lego introduced a new range of models called 'pneumatic Lego'. I can remember the excitement of the children with this new development. Here at last were models that could *do things*. The models had always been fun, but now you could make a digger that could actually lift things. The thing that looked good had become active and useful, in a sense. It had come alive in a new way. Now that too seems to me to be a useful picture of what the Holy Spirit does to us as individuals - but perhaps especially to us as the Church. Think about it. A Lego model is made up of lots of little tiny bits, that in themselves seem quite unimportant. But together, they make a realistic model. If any of the tiny bits is missing, or is in the wrong place, then it is less satisfying. And then you add to that the pneumatic power of air, and the model can really *do* something. It is easy for Christians to feel that they are unimportant, and have little to offer. But Paul's image of us as parts of the Body of Christ challenges that. We all have a part to play, and anyone not in the right place, or missing weakens the whole thing. But then all those little parts are given the strength of the pneuma, the air, the breath of the God's Spirit, and we can begin to *do* things.

So the message for Pentecost is that we should be pneumatic. Think about the pneumatic tyre, and the comfort of the Holy Spirit to enable you to cope with the bumps. Think about the pneumatic drill, and expect the power of the Holy Spirit to be able to change you radically, however hard and unchangeable you might think you are. And think of pneumatic Lego, bringing alive those tiny pieces of plastic, and how the Holy Spirit empowers us all to be the Body of Christ - as the hymn says 'living, working in his world'. And if you want to let your imagination go further, then think of all the other things I could have added - pneumatic brakes, and how the Holy Spirit can prevent us crashing, by his wisdom. Think of the way pneumatic power is used to transmit things - like those old tubes in shops years ago sent the money to the cash desk: think of how the Holy Spirit sends us out to be where God wants us to be. There are so many other things that could be said. But it all adds up to this challenge to be pneumatic - air-powered, in secular terms, Spirit-filled in Christians terms. May God fill us with his Spirit, today and always. Amen.