PENTECOST: MIRACLES DON'T HAPPEN

Posted on May 17, 2016 by Eddie

The day of Pentecost opened up the door to the reality of a multi-ethnic, multi-lingual church, but it took a lot of struggle and argument before the believers saw that they needed to walk through the door.
Category: Church: World

OK; miracles do happen - but stick with me on this one.

Sometimes the events of the day of Pentecost are presented something like this; the Spirit descended on the disciples, they reached out and preached in the streets in all sorts of languages, 3,000 people became Christians and the church was now a glorious multi-ethnic, multi-cultural, multi-lingual group.

That's a great story; but unfortunately,Â the New Testament picture is somewhat different in a few crucial respects. Yes, the disciples rushed out an preached in all sorts of languages (or were understood in different languages) and many people became believers (the term Christian is not appropriate at this point in the story). However, as we saw yesterday, the people who joined the disciples were all Jewish, this was not really a multi-ethnic group.

Even then, there were tensions. We read in Acts 6 that there were disputes between believers who had origins in Palestine and those from the diaspora. Not only was the church still Jewish, it was also riven with division.

So we move on to Acts 8, when Philip preached to the people in Samaria. These were people closely related to the Jewish nation but with some unorthodox ideas. The notion of preaching to them was so radical that a couple of apostles had to come out from Jerusalem to make sure that Philip hadn't gone of the rails. Perhaps its just as well that the Ethiopian eunuch went straight home and didn't have to face an examination by the apostles in Jerusalem.

In Acts 10, Peter had to have a vision repeated three times before he grasped what God was saying to him and even then he faced flak in Jerusalem for sharing food and the message of Jesus with a Gentile.

It isn't till we get to Acts 11 that we find believers deliberately and systematically sharing the message of Jesus with Gentiles. Even then, the authorities in Jerusalem sent Barnabas down to check that nothing was amiss and it wasn't till Acts 15 that the church finally agreed that foreigners could really be part of the group of believers. Even so, if you read Galatians 2:11-13, you can see that racial tension continued in the church for quite a while.

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This is important, because the struggles that the disciples faced in the book of Acts are still very much with us today. The Christian church is the most diverse body on the planet; representing people from every nation on the planet, but it can be difficult to make this diversity work on a local basis.

Sadly, there are no miracles which will make the church more diverse; only the gritty work of

sharing, learning, making mistakes and forgiving one another. It isn't glamorous, but it is the way forward for the church in our increasingly diverse world. Once again, I'd really recommendÂ Turning the Tables on MissionÂ as a resource for British Christians who want to look at this area.

Just one final thought; part of the problem of integrating people into the early Church lay in the fact that the Jewish people saw themselves as being better than others; a privileged race. We wouldn't be guilty of that would we?