**Getting the Balance Right**

(*some thoughts as we approach Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit was given to Peter and the other disciples after Jesus had been taken up into heaven*)

You may or may not know that before I became a Methodist Minister, I read biochemistry at university and spent some time teaching chemistry. Within this ‘former life’ of mine I had to learn and teach about catalysts and enzymes. (Enzymes are actually biological catalysts). I do not want to say anything too detailed about catalysts here, but rather want to reflect on their main function which is to speed up or slow down the rate of a chemical reaction.

Increasing the rate of a reaction is important in many industrial processes in order to make them economically worthwhile. Some rely heavily on catalysts for this to happen and some reactions, in fact, would not normally occur in the absence of a catalyst. In other cases, reaction speeds can be slowed down by catalysts, such as when there is the need to delay the rate of something decomposing. Living things are even more reliant on catalysts because very specific enzymes are needed for each chemical reaction which takes place.

Catalysts are substances which alter the rates of chemical reactions without undergoing any overall change themselves.

When you think about the work of the Holy Spirit, do you think that the Spirit is more like a catalyst which speeds you up, or one which slows you down? If we think about the images which we use for the Spirit, some may give us the idea that the Spirit is there to energise and empower us, such as the strong blowing wind and flames of fire in Acts 2. Other images, such as that of breath and a dove, are more gentle. Perhaps we may feel that these impart a sense of the Spirit refreshing us, allowing us to pause and to receive from God.

Suddenly a noise like a strong, blowing wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw something like flames of fire that were separated and stood over each person there. They were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and they began to speak different languages by the power the Holy Spirit was giving them. (Acts 2:2-4, NCV)

In our Christian living, God gives us the Holy Spirit to help us. In some cases, the Spirit can be the catalyst which fires and directs God’s mission. At other times, the Spirit is the catalyst which slows us down that we might be still and be refilled. We need the Spirit to facilitate both these states and to seek a balance between them. Otherwise, on the one hand, we might burn ourselves out or, on the other, we might fail to engage effectively in God’s mission.

May you know the Spirit’s presence in your life, both to empower you and refresh you.

Philip.