

Pentecost Service for 23 May, 2021

From the United Reformed Church at Morpeth,
Widdrington and Gt Bavington

Opening Words

Good morning and welcome to our online worship this Sunday which is of course Pentecost Sunday when we celebrate the coming of the Holy Spirit, and the birth of the church. Let us begin our worship by asking the Holy Spirit to come and fill us again.

HYMN: O breath of life come sweeping through us

O Breath of life, come sweeping through us,
Revive Your church with life and power.
O Breath of life, come, cleanse, renew us,
And fit Your church to meet this hour.

O Wind of God, come bend us, break us,
Till humbly we confess our need;
Then in Your tenderness remake us,
Revive, restore, for this we plead.

O Breath of love, come breathe within us,
Renewing thought and will and heart;
Come, Love of Christ, afresh to win us,
Revive Your church in every part.

Bessie Porter Head

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Prayer of approach

Spirit of compassion, we bring you our hearts.
Spirit of discernment, we bring you our choices.
Spirit of wisdom, we bring you our minds.
Spirit of boldness, we bring you our words.
Spirit of fulfilment, we bring you our longings.
Spirit of abundance, we bring you our resources.
Spirit of creation, we bring you our lives.

We praise you, God of all time,
for speaking to us through the tongues of Pentecost,
for stirring our longings with the excitement of
Pentecost,
for uniting our communities with the inclusiveness of
Pentecost.
Fill our lives, we pray,
with the enormity of Pentecost,
until they overflow with compassion and commitment
to care
for and celebrate all creation to the glory of your name.
AMEN

(From Roots)

This is the day when the church celebrates the coming of the Holy Spirit. It's a day of celebration and a day of challenge. It's a day of praise and a day of prayer.

Reading: John 15:26-27, 16:4b-15

In some medieval churches, you might find a Holy Spirit hole in the ceiling of the church.

In the Middle Ages, cathedrals and great churches throughout Western Europe were fitted with a peculiar architectural feature known as a Holy Ghost hole; a small circular opening in the roof that symbolized the entrance of Holy Spirit into the midst of the assembled worshippers. At Pentecost, these Holy Ghost holes would be decorated with flowers, and sometimes a dove figure lowered through into the church while the story of the Pentecost was read. Holy Ghost holes can still be seen today in European churches.

Saints Vitus and Katharina Church in Rehling, Germany
St. Blaise Church in Dillingen an der Donau, Germany
Saints Peter and Paul Church in Söll, Austria

The medieval church took upon itself the task of making sure the festivals of the church were the dominant guiding force in daily life. So it is that Pentecost was one of the most unique days on the church's calendar.

In an attempt to dramatize the coming of the Holy Spirit the leaders of Pentecost services involved architecture, not just anthems. During the Pentecost worship, servants who were waiting on the roof would release live doves through those holes. This living symbol of the Holy Spirit would descend toward the people below as the choirboys broke into the whooshing and drumming sound of a holy windstorm. Then, down from the holes would float thousands of rose petals, symbolizing the tongues of flame that rested on the first recipients of the Spirit.

Can you imagine such a thing? In spite of the fact that you would have to keep your head covered with all those birds flying around, it would have been such a tangible and yet mysterious reminder of the Holy Spirit's arrival.

Holy Spirit Holes are, I would propose, what we need as a church and as individuals. But we need those holes not to let the Holy Spirit in, since It arrives within us without such assistance. We need Holy Spirit Holes for releasing into the world what is created by the Spirit within us.

Because we celebrate the coming of the Holy Spirit this Pentecost, not so much as a blessing on the church, but

because it ignited the church into Mission and sent those first disciples out into the world to tell the good news of Christ.

Reading; Acts 2 : 1-21 (visual)

CS Lewis – Aslan breathing on the stone statues

Hymn: Come down O love divine

Come down, O love divine, seek thou this soul of mine,
and visit it with thine own ardour glowing;
O Comforter, draw near, within my heart appear,
and kindle it, Thy holy flame bestowing.

O let it freely burn, til earthly passions turn
to dust and ashes in its heat consuming;
And let thy glorious light shine ever on my sight,
and clothe me round, the while my path illuming.

Let holy charity mine outward vesture be,
and lowliness become mine inner clothing;
True lowliness of heart, which takes the humbler part,
and o'er its own shortcomings weeps with loathing.

And so the yearning strong, with which the soul will
long,
shall far outpass the power of human telling;
For none can guess its grace, till they become the place
where-in the Holy Spirit finds a dwelling.

Bianco De Siena

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Sermon

Today we celebrate the coming of the Holy Spirit onto the disciples that gave birth to the church. Before Jesus left the disciples, he tells them about this Spirit that was to come to them, Jesus says this:

“I will send you the spirit who comes from the Father and show what is true. The Spirit will help you and will tell you about me”

“The spirit will come and show the people of this world the truth about sin and God’s justice and the judgement”

“The spirit shows what is true and will come and guide you into the full truth”

We celebrate because the Spirit has been given to all those who believe, and this Spirit works in all who believe, to work out God’s purpose for the whole of his creation.

We celebrate today, not because the Spirit came 2000 years ago which started the whole thing off. We celebrate because the Spirit still comes, and is present in our lives today, that same Spirit, that continues to work in the hearts of all who believe, for the working out of God’s kingdom here on earth.

I want to just reflect on how this Spirit is evident in our lives today and how today it might still guide us and show us what is true.

How good we are at listening to the Spirit?
If the presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives is a reality, how do we recognise it?
What difference does the Spirit makes in our lives, and how do we show that to others?

The account of the coming of the Holy Spirit in Acts, seems to be such a miraculous, earth shattering event, with a noise that could be heard from heaven, with a mighty wind, and with the supernatural ability to talk in foreign languages - that we might be forgiven for thinking that this was a once only event. That it can’t have happened again otherwise we would have heard about it.

But the Holy Spirit continues to come, and be present with us in our lives today. The people who prepared this little booklet asked people where they experienced the Holy Spirit as individuals and together as church and this is some of the things they said:

We experience the Holy Spirit.....

- In our shared discernment (meeting together and coming to a combined decision)
- When we come together
- Listening to one another, prayer, moving into grace
- When a person is at peace with him/herself
- Awareness of learning or growth
- In times when inspired and excited
- There at the edges of experience
- When people are ready to be courageous
- In being disturbed
- In openness
- In excitement and caution.

I’m going to just think which of these resonates most with you.... How would you answer if you were asked how you experienced the Holy Spirit.

Well, I want to explore how we might recognise and experience the Holy Spirit in our lives, and what that might mean to us, and why that might give us cause for celebration today?

The booklet identifies 5 marks of the Holy Spirit that affect the way in which we organise ourselves as

church. I want to take these 5 marks of the Holy Spirit and share them with you today, because they speak about that one spirit, and speaks as much to us individually as they do corporately.

The first mark of the Holy Spirit is this:

The Holy Spirit is the giver of life and the energiser.

We know this because God breathed life into Adam in the beginning, and he breathed life into those dry bones in Ezekiel, and God says:

“My Spirit will give you breath, and you will live again.”

Do you feel alive?

The spirit is the giver of life – we know the Spirit is with us when we feel alive, hopeful for all that might happen, eager to grow and develop.

Do you feel energised? *(the response will indicate the answer)*

The spirit is the energiser. If you don't feel energised, its not because you don't have the Holy Spirit and its not because your too old, but more because you are probably doing the wrong things. That you are not letting the Spirit do what it needs to do in your life. That the Spirit is being repressed rather than being released.

One way we can recognise the truth that Spirit is trying to show us is by recognising those things that we have the energy for. What is it that gets us excited? What is that we will do even if it takes our very last breath. If the Spirit is with us, then we will be energised, the Spirit will breathe life into us – the Spirit doesn't drain our energy – it is what gives energy.

You know energy drinks have become very popular. High in calories and caffeine, these drinks give people a boost of energy to overcome tiredness.

It's a bit like when my boys drink Sugary fizzy drinks. They are buzzing. Suddenly they have so much energy they just cant contain it. They behaving in a way that is not natural. They become animated and have difficulty supressing this injection of energy. No matter how tired they were before, now suddenly they are full of life again.

That's how it should be with the Holy Spirit – it is the energiser – we recognise the Holy Spirit working in us because we have an almost supernatural energy to do things, despite how tired we might normally feel.

If you don't feel like that, it may just be because you are doing the wrong things.

Frederick Buechner says:

“The place God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet”

When we listen to the Spirit, and follow where it is leading us, then we will be energised, we will be full of joy – and that for me is the first and most important way we can be guided by the Spirit – what is that gives joy and energy and brings life – because there is where the Spirit will be?

The Holy Spirit is the giver of gifts.

We each receive a gift of the Holy Spirit, but this is not that same gift for everyone.

What is your gift? What does the Spirit call you to do? Again – this will be something you enjoy, but also something that meets a need, that fulfils God's purpose.

You know,

The Spirit comes powerfully upon Samson in the Old Testament and he tears a lion apart with his bare hands.

The Spirit comes upon Zechariah who prophesies to the people

The Spirit comes upon Othniel who goes to war and wins (Judges 3:10)

The Spirit comes upon Gideon who defeats the Midianite army with just 300 men

The Spirit came upon Mary who became pregnant

Throughout the history of God's people, the Spirit comes and gives a particular gift for the fulfilling of God's purpose, so whether you can wrestle lions, or paint, or read, or talk, or listen, or abseil, or build boats, or teach Chemistry or lead worship, or mend socks – whatever gift the Spirit has given you will bring you great joy and energy – but you need to listen to the Spirit to find out for yourself where the Spirit is leading you to use that gift in the work of the kingdom.

The Holy Spirit dwells in the midst of God's people.

Part of our job as Christians, as a Church, is to make the Spirit, which is invisible, and non-descript, and intangible, to make that Spirit real, and visible and tangible to the world.

It is good that we are starting to welcome and encourage people to come into our buildings through the various groups and events that form part of our church programmes. But if they don't experience something of the Spirit for themselves then we are never going to grow the kingdom, then we are not fulfilling our mission and calling as a church. How do we help those who know nothing of the Spirit, sense something of its presence when they come through our doors?

It is great that during this time of lockdown we have been able to worship at home. Perhaps you are in your pyjamas, perhaps you haven't yet got out of bed,

perhaps you are sitting on a nice comfy sofa with a cup of tea. It is great that we can be comfortable when we worship but sometimes this is at the expense of a sense of fear and trembling. When we come to worship God, do we feel a sense of fear and trembling because of the presence of the Spirit within our worship? Are we afraid of what might happen to us in our encounter with the God's Spirit this morning? Do we deny ourselves the very present reality of the Spirit that dwells amongst us.

The Holy Spirit leads God's people into truth...

I enjoy the Bible Studies that I have been involved in during the lockdown. Whenever we engage in studying the bible together it is as much a learning experience for me as anyone else. We all have different views about what the Bible says and it is great to come together and share these.

The Holy Spirit leads us into truth... "not my truth or your truth, but God's truth. As members of the body of Christ talk together, different perceptions of truth are shared, recognising that God's truth will only be seen in all its fullness at the [end times]."

They say there are always three sides to any story - your side, my side and the right side. The Spirit leads us to see the truth that lies somewhere inbetween your truth and my truth, and the more people we share with the closer we get to the real truth.

We need to be ever open to new insights, ever open to listen to one another's stories and experience, ever open to different views about Scripture, because it is through bringing together all these truths that we are led by the Spirit to see God's truth.

"The Holy Spirit is the sender"

The Holy Spirit never calls us to be inward looking, but orientates us outward.

We recognise the presence of the Holy Spirit that drives outward and onward, ever further into the world as we recognise our part in the purpose of God for the whole of Creation.

When the Spirit came on those disciples at Pentecost, they began speaking in foreign languages, not so they could share with each other, but so they could share with others from all over the known world. The Spirit's gift directs them outward and prepares to send them out into the world.

The image of coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost is of a dove and fire. Because the holy spirit descends like a dove, but then the disciples are set alight, with tongues of flame alighting on them, and like a fire, the Spirit spreads uncontrollably ever outward until the whole of world has been touched and set alight too.

So today we celebrate this Holy Spirit that is the energiser and life giver, the giver of gifts, dwells in the midst of God's people, leads us into truth and sends us outward to share this Spirit with the whole of creation.

I pray that today, this church, each of you, might experience for yourself the reality of the Holy Spirit present in your life, and that you too might be set alight to fulfil your calling and God's purpose for you in the world.

Amen

Prayers of Intercession - based on the hymn "O Breath of life"

Hymn: There's a Spirit in the air

There's a spirit in the air,
telling Christians everywhere:
"Praise the love that Christ revealed,
living, working in our world."

Lose your shyness, find your tongue;
tell the world what God has done:
God in Christ has come to stay,
we can see his power today.

When believers break the bread
when a hungry child is fed:
praise the love that Christ revealed
living, working in our world.

Still his Spirit leads the fight,
seeing wrong and setting right:
God in Christ has come to stay,
we can see his power today.

When a stranger's not alone,
where the homeless find a home,
praise the love that Christ revealed,
living, working in our world.

May the Spirit fill our praise,
guide our thoughts and change our ways:
God in Christ has come to stay,
we can see his power today.

There's a Spirit in the air,
calling people everywhere:
praise the love that Christ revealed,
living, working in our world.

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Blessing