

Worshipping God Together : Apart
Sunday 23rd May 2021 at 10.30am
Church; Physically Distanced but Spiritually United
Worship Prepared by Rev. Janine Atkinson

A Call to Worship

Celebrate! The time of waiting is over!

The time is now!

Listen - now, for the language of God's love;

feel the energy and enjoy the embrace of God's presence

made known to us; dwelling in us

because the promised Spirit has come.

Alleluia!

Hymn - R&S 295: MP 67: (Tune: Clifton Hundred)

Breathe on me, breath of God, fill me with life anew,
that I may love what thou dost love, and do what thou wouldst do.

Breathe on me, breath of God, until my heart is pure,
until with thee I will one will to do and to endure.

Breathe on me, breath of God, till I am wholly thine,
until this earthly part of me glows with thy fire divine.

Breathe on me, breath of God; so shall I never die,
but live with thee the perfect life of thine eternity

Edwin Hatch (1835-89) altd.

Approaching God in Prayer

Lord God, here I am again

to say thank you and to praise you for all that you have done.

Today I want to thank you that you did not leave your disciples to
manage on their own.

Like me, they were worried and confused about what the future holds.

But you sent your promised Holy Spirit to breathe life and confidence into their hearts and lives.

I want to thank you that, because of your promise to give your Holy Spirit to your closest companions
you also give us that same Holy Spirit,
to breathe life and confidence into our hearts and our lives.

Come afresh today, fill me with your love,
transform me and teach me your ways.

Those who come to you Lord are many people,
with many languages
many needs, many sorrows, many joys, many questions.
Yet the story of Pentecost reminds us that you are
alive and active through your diversity which meets each of us,
just as we are, in every need and joy
so that, when I listen, I might hear you speaking 'my' language,

But I am aware that my life does not always match the measure of
your example; without your Spirit's help I fail you Lord.

So I ask you to forgive me, and to fill me again with your Spirit.

Forgive me - forgive us - when we are afraid of diversity;
when we stifle creativity; when we impose uniformity;
when we suppress energy and joy
Forgive us, and bring us - like those first disciples,
from a place of hesitance to a place of hope;
from disappointment to delight; from caution to celebration.

Come, Holy Spirit, speak words of healing;

Speak words of peace;

Speak words of reconciliation;

Speak words of love

so that we may repeat your loving Word
to others

in your glorious name. Amen.



Now, 'listen' for God's Word as you read what the Gospel writer, John has to say

Bible Readings: John 15 v 26 – 27; 16 v 4 – 15

²⁶ 'When the Advocate comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who comes from the Father, he will testify on my behalf. ²⁷ You also are to testify because you have been with me from the beginning.

¹⁶ I have said these things to you so that when their hour comes you may remember that I told you about them.

The Work of the Spirit

'I did not say these things to you from the beginning, because I was with you. ⁵ But now I am going to him who sent me; yet none of you asks me, "Where are you going?" ⁶ But because I have said these things to you, sorrow has filled your hearts. ⁷ Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Advocate will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you. ⁸ And when he comes, he will prove the world wrong about sin and righteousness and judgement: ⁹ about sin, because they do not believe in me; ¹⁰ about righteousness, because I am going to the Father and you will see me no longer; ¹¹ about judgement, because the ruler of this world has been condemned.

¹² 'I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. ¹³ When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own, but will speak whatever he hears, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. ¹⁴ He will glorify me, because he will take what is mine and declare it to you. ¹⁵ All that the Father has is mine. For this reason I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you.

Acts 2 v 1 – 21 *The Coming of the Holy Spirit*

2 When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. ² And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were

sitting. ³ Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. ⁴ All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.

⁵ Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. ⁶ And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each. ⁷ Amazed and astonished, they asked, 'Are not all these who are speaking Galileans?' ⁸ And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language? ⁹ Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, ¹⁰ Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, ¹¹ Cretans and Arabs—in our own languages we hear them speaking about God's deeds of power.' ¹² All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, 'What does this mean?' ¹³ But others sneered and said, 'They are filled with new wine.'

Peter Addresses the Crowd

¹⁴ But Peter, standing with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed them: 'Men of Judea and all who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and listen to what I say. ¹⁵ Indeed, these are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only nine o'clock in the morning. ¹⁶ No, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel:

¹⁷ "In the last days it will be, God declares,
that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh,
and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,
and your young men shall see visions,
and your old men shall dream dreams.

¹⁸ Even upon my slaves, both men and women,
in those days I will pour out my Spirit;
and they shall prophesy.

¹⁹ And I will show portents in the heaven above
and signs on the earth below,
blood, and fire, and smoky mist.

²⁰ The sun shall be turned to darkness

*and the moon to blood,
before the coming of the Lord's great and glorious day.
21 Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved."*

Hymn - StF 394: (Tune: The Skye Boat Song)

*Spirit of God, unseen as the wind,
gentle as is the dove,
teach us the truth and help us believe,
show us the Saviour's love.*

You spoke to us long, long ago,
gave us the written word;
we read it still, needing its truth,
through it God's voice is heard.

Spirit of God.....

Without your help we fail our Lord,
we cannot live his way;
we need your power, we need your strength,
following Christ each day.

Spirit of God.....

Margaret V Old. © Scripture Union



Reflections

The Acts of the Apostles could just as well have been named the Acts of the Holy Spirit, because the Book tells the story of the activity of the Apostles, not working in their own strength, but inspired and emboldened by the power of God's Holy Spirit. Reading Acts we realise that without God's gift of the Holy Spirit, Jesus would have been little more than a Prophet, the Disciples would have been a few 'hangers on' to a 'celebrity' from bygone days and we could not know and experience God as we do now.

Pentecost was a turning point. The Church looks back on this day as the beginning of its life - making today the Church's birthday! It marks

the day when Jesus - the bearer of the Spirit, became the 'bestower' - the 'giver' of the Spirit. From this point on we realise that the waiting and hiding in Jerusalem is over, and God's Word is released - now it can move outwards to all nations. God could now bless and embrace the world. This is the impact of the Holy Spirit!

The coming of the Holy Spirit draws together some threads from the Old Testament (the Hebrew Scriptures) throughout which the Spirit's story had been unfolding as people made their attempts to understand God's activity and nature.

The creation story describes how a 'power' or a 'wind' from God swept over the face of the waters. And the Pentecost story also features a strong wind blowing. Some Bible translators even prefer to use the word 'Spirit' for God's 'creative' breath.

The storm and fire of Pentecost hint at Sinai after Moses had met God up the mountain where there was thick cloud, thunder and lightning and the mountain was covered in smoke, because God came down the mountain in fire.

Then the tongues with which the Apostles spoke, sounded clearly in the ears of the hearers gathered together from many lands. This seems to undo the confusion of Babel. The Holy Spirit creates new possibilities of understanding for a diverse human community.

It's easy to imagine a babble of sound as the Apostles started to speak - an incomprehensible noise. But, in fact, the opposite was true. What people heard was utterly 'comprehensible' almost 'overcomprehensible' – and that's the amazing thing. Those who didn't normally understand each other, understood *clearly* what was being spoken and demonstrated about God's deeds of power.

This Pentecost crowd was Jewish by race, but cosmopolitan by place, residence and belonging. Yet they all understood in the language with

which they had grown up - from the mouths of people who did not share their language. And yet, none of them had lost the rich diversity and expression of their own nationality and culture. All these people now had the potential, and capacity to carry the Good News of God's power, fresh out of Jerusalem and spread it across the world in every language.

This confident and joyful proclamation of God's power and the deeds concerning Jesus Christ, was made entirely comprehensible to the diverse gathering, through the work of the Holy Spirit. One-and-the-same Spirit alighted on each, enabling those who didn't normally understand each other to understand each other clearly.

Then, Peter's speech, drawing on Joel and the Psalms, had one clear thread - What you see and hear is a sign that Jesus is risen, and ascended, and reigns as Lord.

So, a Church was born, an identifiable group, who still shared in Israel's Worship, but with a life and loyalty all of its own. Its members believed in baptism to cleanse, renew and proclaim Christ as Lord and in breaking bread together when they met - just as Jesus had asked them to do.

These people of faith had a cheerfully generous spirit as they shared goods and cared for each other. These were the hallmarks of a Church born out of Jesus' example and empowered by the Spirit.

That particular day of Pentecost brought the past into the present - and shaped the future.

Birthdays are times to look back as well as forward, so, on the Church's birthday, I wonder, what hallmarks of the *early*, Spirit-filled and driven Church remain? Write your answers on a postcard.....!

It's easy to lose confidence when our Churches feel fragile and fearful.

What, I wonder, are the ways in which your Church is identifiable as the Church founded on Jesus' example and the Spirit's gifts and fruits? What are the questions we need to ask ourselves and what are the Spiritual building blocks on which we can build and increase our reach to a world in need of the God whose love we know and share?

When gold and silver are fashioned into something with form, beauty or purpose, they are marked with a 'Hallmark' the maker's individual marking and they are identifiable by that 'Hallmark'.

Imagine the Church (your church) fashioned into something with form, beauty and purpose by our maker and hallmarked with our maker's mark. What would a Church Hallmarked by the Holy Spirit look like?

A Church hallmarked by the Holy Spirit is one that reaches out to those in need, sharing what we have with a generous spirit, sharing goods, and caring for each other in active and practical ways.

A Church hallmarked by the Holy Spirit meets and prays, breaks bread together, baptises and blesses others through its activity.

A Church hallmarked by the Holy Spirit is one that encourages and builds people up, that shares stories of faith and God alive and active in the lives of its people - individually and collective. It is animated, inspired, and empowered, embodying God's love, abundance, grace and glory.

A Church hallmarked by the Holy Spirit is one that speaks about Jesus in ways that people will understand, that makes God known by matching Word and action. It's known by the way it engages with those who need to hear, in ways they can recognise - God's Words of justice, peace, love, transformation, release, inclusion, restoration, wholeness and healing - all found in the embrace of God, made known to us as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, multifaceted and multi-experienced by each one of us - as a community, and as individuals.

The Church which embodies the Spirit is one that opens itself up to represent the gifts of the Spirit, in life-enhancing, enriching, unifying and invigorating ways. I will have no truck with ways that lead to disintegration, division and damage.

The Pentecost event exceeded any previous experiences, expectations and effects of the Spirit. And because of that day, we can experience the Holy Spirit - alive and active in diverse, and enduring ways across time, place and space.

So take heart, have confidence, the story of the day of Pentecost reminds us that the Holy Spirit is active when we are at our most vulnerable and afraid, that it can inspire, embolden and equip us, as it did those first disciples, fearing for their lives.

And, although such an event might never be repeated, or directly adopted as our own experience, the promises it alludes to can be understood. The promise is that, because of and through the work of the Holy Spirit - despite our diversity and differences - we will be enabled to talk *about* God, and each of us will be enabled to *hear* and understand the 'other' in comprehensible and unifying ways, from nation to nation and person to person. Amen

Hymn - R&S 294: MP 89:

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, till 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 he become the place
wherein the Holy Spirit makes his dwelling.

Bianco Da Siena (d. 1434) tr. R. F. Littledale (1833-90)

Some words from Romans Chapter 8 (26b – 27)

The Spirit comes to help us, weak as we are. For we do not know how we ought to pray; the Spirit himself pleads with God for us in groans that words cannot express. And God, who sees into our hearts, knows what the thought of the Spirit is; because the Spirit pleads with God on behalf of his people and in accordance with his will.

In a moment of quiet, prepare yourself for prayer. Keep times of silence as you pray for people and situations you know of...

Holding the World in Prayer

We have heard about you - God of wind, and dove, and fire
in stories of transformational power.

Speak now Lord God, your word of freedom, peace, and change
over lands divided by war, by creed and by greed...

Speak your word of refreshment, assurance, and warmth
over lives afflicted by exhaustion and illness...

Speak your word of integrity, humility, and challenge
over churches crippled by fear and finances...

Speak your word of calm, gentleness, and comfort
over lives broken by grief and loss...

Speak your word of power, anointing and healing over each one of us,

so that this day of Pentecost may inspire new beginnings,
fresh insight, new birth and fresh courage
may it provide the catalyst for change in each of us
and spill out with joy to *meet* the Lord in the world and share the Lord
with the world.

Help us to take our part in the Acts of your Holy Spirit to bring about
your Pentecost so that, when those who are bowed down have the
courage to stand tall - the power of Pentecost will have come.
When those who have been afraid to speak out, find their voice -
the power of Pentecost will have come.
When all voices are heard, and all can hear God speaking to them
in words they can understand - the power of Pentecost will have come.
Amen.

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name;
thy kingdom come; thy will be done; on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread.

And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us.

And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil.

For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory,
for ever and ever. Amen.

Hymn - R&S 310: MP 198

Gracious Spirit, Holy Ghost, taught by thee, we covet most,
of thy gifts at Pentecost, holy, heavenly love.

Faith that mountains could remove, tongues of earth or heaven above,
knowledge, all things, empty prove if I have no love.

Though I as a martyr bleed, give my goods the poor to feed,
all is vain, if love I need; therefore give me love.

Love is kind, and suffers long; love is meek, and thinks no wrong,
love than death itself more strong; therefore give us love.

Prophecy will fade away, melting in the light of day;
love will ever with us stay; therefore give us love.

Faith and hope and love we see, joining hand in hand, agree;
but the greatest of the three, and the best, is love.

Christopher Wordsworth (1807-85) altd. Based on 1 Corinthians 13

Closing Words and Blessing

Remember that God speaks to us in the riches of creation;
in the stories of Jesus; in the lives of other people;
and in words and ways that we both can and cannot understand

So, God of fire and beauty, warm us
God of peace and justice, disturb us
God of wind and wonder, amaze us
God of Pentecost, kindle your love in our lives.



And may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,
the love of God
and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with us all, evermore. Amen

A Personal Prayer

Spirit of God, speak to me in language my heart can embrace,
in language my mind can understand,
in the language of silence that sinks deep into my soul.
Spirit of God, speak to me words of transformation,
words of empowerment, words of grace.
Thank you. Amen.

*Hymn words reproduced under the CCLI Licence numbers of the SPACE Group of Churches: 181588 - Grove URC: 178113 - The URC Heckmondwike: 177949 - Longcauseway Church: 1236906 - Norrithorpe URC: 783508 - Ravensthorpe with Hopton URC
All Images - www.pixabay.com*