

28th May 2023 – Morning Service

Let the Spirit bear witness to Christ

Rev Alan Combes

Call to Worship

It's Pentecost and God declares: I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh. Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved. Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful people, and kindle in us the fire of your love; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

StF 372 – Come down O love divine

- | | |
|--|---|
| 1) 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. | 3) 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. |
| 2) 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. | 4) 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. |

Biano da Siena translated by Richard Frederick Littledale

Prayer

Like a mighty, rushing wind, like tongues of living flame, the Spirit fills this place where we - God's people - meet. So we bring our prayers of praise for the Holy Spirit.

We praise you creator Spirit of God. It is you who makes the bread of our communion Christ's body which heals and reconciles us to God and makes us together the body of Christ. You make our wine the communion of Christ's saving blood to redeem the world. You come like the wind of heaven, unseen, unbidden. Like the dawn you illuminate the world around us; you grant us each breath and a new beginning every day.

Holy Spirit, we come as we are to worship. We bring our lives, our baggage, our joys and our sorrows. Grant us today, in this moment, the gift of sight, that we may see and know more deeply and more keenly the presence and the power of Almighty God, through Jesus the son, in the world and in our lives.

Giving Spirit, you filled Jesus with courage and the purest, costliest, saving love. Come and fill us again we pray. Give us courage and fire and strength beyond our everyday resources. May we all grow in the fruits of the spirit and be blessed by gifts according to our need. Make us compassionate to serve the world.

Counselling Spirit, comfort us and assure our hearts once again that we are in Christ and so children of God. **Amen**

At the beginning of Acts 2 we hear the amazing account of the coming of the Holy Spirit, resting upon the disciples and enabling them to share the Good News in many languages. Directly after this Peter addresses the crowd...

Reading: Acts 2:14, 22-24, 32-36 Peter addresses the crowd

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. Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with deeds of power, wonders, and signs that God did through him among you, as you yourselves know—this man, handed over to you according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of those outside the law. But God raised him up, having freed him from death, because it was impossible for him to be held in its power. This Jesus God raised up, and of that all of us are witnesses. Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you both see and hear. For David did not ascend into the heavens, but he himself says, ‘The Lord said to my Lord, “Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool.” ’ Therefore let the entire house of Israel know with certainty that God has made him both Lord and Messiah, this Jesus whom you crucified.”

Meditation – Peter: We shouldn’t have been surprised by Nick Fawcett

We shouldn't have been surprised, not if we'd had any sense; it was what we'd been told to expect, what he'd promised us. But we never imagined anything quite so extraordinary.

We were waiting, it's true, gathered together as so often before, but we'd been doing that for days and our confidence had taken a hammering. We were going through the motions, that's all, telling each other he hadn't forgotten us, talking of the future as though we still believed in it, yet wondering in our hearts if there was anything to look forward to. I mean, what could we hope to achieve when all was said and done. What reason to think that we, a motley bunch if ever there was one, should fare better than our master? We wanted to carry on his work, don't get me wrong: we wanted to tell people what had happened, help them find faith for themselves, but how could we even hope to begin?

So we kept the doors locked and sang our hymns and said our prayers and hid our doubts. Until suddenly it happened! I can't properly describe it even now, but it changed our lives. It was as though a mighty wind blew away the cobwebs, a refreshing breeze revived our flagging faith, a breath of air stirred our spirits. As though a tiny spark rekindled our confidence, a tongue of fire set our hearts aflame, a raging inferno swept our fears away. As though life had begun again, the world become a different place, and each of us been born anew. I know that doesn't make sense, but it's the best I can do. You'll have to experience it for yourself to understand.

And you can, just as we did. Believe me, we never would have thought it possible, despite all Jesus said to us. We were lost, lonely, frightened, hopelessly aware of our weaknesses, searching for any strengths. We never thought we'd change a soul, let alone the world, but that's because we had no idea how God could change us!

Prayer

Gracious God, we thank you for those extraordinary moments we occasionally experience which change our lives, giving us joy and fulfilment we never imagined possible. We thank you especially for the great gift of your Holy Spirit - an experience which transformed the lives of the apostles, which has changed the lives of countless believers across the centuries and which has power to reshape our lives here and now. Open our hearts, our minds and our souls to your living presence so that we shall know your life-changing power for ourselves. **Amen**

Song – On Fire

<i>Ch) On fire, to carry the flame, On fire, renew us again On fire, to lift up the name of Jesus. On fire, a light in the land, On fire, to live hand in hand, On fire, together we stand, 'Till we are on fire.</i>	1) We celebrate the moment, Of the church's birth, By the flame of Pentecost, By heaven come to earth. Young men will see visions, Old men will dream dreams; Where God pours out His Spirit, The work of love is seen.	2) Through these days of conflict, In this world of change, Across the page of history The message stays the same: Glorify the Father, Witness to the Son, To burn with His compassion Until the race is run.
---	--	--

Paul Field © 1994 Windswept Pacific Music Ltd CCL No. 515642

Reading: John 14:8–17, 25-27

Philip said to him, 'Lord, show us the Father, and we will be satisfied.' Jesus said to him, 'Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and you still do not know me? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, "Show us the Father"? Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own; but the Father who dwells in me does his works. Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; but if you do not, then believe me because of the works themselves. Very truly, I tell you, the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these, because I am going to the Father. I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If in my name you ask me for anything, I will do it.'

'If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you for ever. This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you.'

'I have said these things to you while I am still with you. But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you. Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.'

Sermon

John Wesley was once accused by his Oxford colleagues of being too enthusiastic for his faith! Too full of the Spirit! Wesley's response was to weigh in with steel toe capped boots! He prepared, and gave a sermon to his peers, all Oxford dons and students, and he began by reminding them that "we are in the presence of God, and will soon be with him!" He went on to ask: are you filled with the Holy Spirit, do you offer a living image of Jesus Christ to the world? OR do you scoff when a fellow or friend starts a conversation on a spiritual topic or wants to talk about God? Who here takes God seriously - he asks? At the heart of his subsequent sermon, he tackles an issue which many of us struggle with, and perhaps some even fear – the Gifts of the Spirit - those empowering and differing skills and abilities granted by God, through the Holy Spirit according to our calling, life and ministry.

Paul says in Romans 12:3-8 *We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us. If your gift is prophesying, then prophesy in accordance with your faith; if it is serving, then serve; if it is teaching, then teach; if it is to encourage, then give encouragement; if it is giving, then give generously; if it is to lead, do it diligently; if it is to show mercy, do it cheerfully.*

Some Christian traditions place heavy emphasis on the Gifts of the Spirit and Wesley acknowledges the importance and role they play in our faith journey but he also recognises that they can sometimes be a distraction.

He goes on to highlight the Fruits of the Spirit – love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control – and reminds us that these are promised to all as part of our journey towards becoming more Christ-like. Indeed, he says the fruits should be our primary goal and argues that they are more important than the gifts.

I want to take a moment today to reflect on the real purpose of Pentecost. There is a natural tendency to focus on the Holy Spirit or indeed on the creation and birth of the Church and both are important, but they are actually secondary. When we truly look at Pentecost in Acts 2 what do we notice? The Holy Spirit comes in a great miracle, and Peter stands, raises his voice and preaches Christ – attested by God, with deeds of power, and wonders and signs. He preaches Christ crucified. And he preaches Christ risen - death, has been overcome!

At Pentecost, the Holy Spirit comes and we see the birth of the church, but Pentecost is not about the Holy Spirit or indeed initially about the church. It is all about Christ. Paul says in verse 33 onwards: *'having received from the father, the promise of the Holy Spirit he has poured out all this that you might both see and hear that God has made Jesus, Lord and Messiah.* In Greek, the words **poured out** means to plunge into or to fully experience; the word **see** means to watch out for, to face and understand and the word **hear** means to pay attention and receive. Effectively Peter is saying that the Holy Spirit has come to plunge us into God, that we might fully experience God in Christ, that we might watch out for him and pay attention to him, that we might face God in him.

I had the great privilege of visiting Jerusalem several years ago, and as part of our preparation, we spent time respecting and learning about the other faiths represented in that complex part of the world. As I learnt, I became convinced that only Christianity, in and through Christ addresses our brokenness. Only in Christianity does God say: I know you can never be perfectly obedient, I know you can never always keep the law. Only in Christianity, does God, step in and act on our behalf, through Christ, to redeem us, and set us right that we might be with God.

Pentecost - it's not about the Holy Spirit or the church. It's only about one thing - Jesus Christ – who is God, Son and Saviour. The very heart of the purpose of the Holy Spirit in the Trinity is to bear witness to our spirit as to the truth of who Jesus Christ is. This is what Peter was seeking to do as he stood before the crowd on that day, filled with the Holy Spirit, and given the gift of preaching. I sometimes wonder – do we as a church need to rediscover our love and passion for Jesus? Do we need to rediscover our passion to explore his life, to learn from his teaching and to follow his example of sacrifice?

I have recently been re-reading the book of Hebrews in the new Testament, which is a sermon to a tired and worried community. What I've noticed is that instead of addressing and seeking to solve these issues of the early church, the preacher's response to those challenges is to spend 8 chapters unpacking the superiority of Christ, followed by 3 chapters on the new covenant that Christ's death and resurrection bring about. Is this Pentecost our opportunity to bring Jesus back to the centre of our being, to the centre of our lives, to the centre of our churches? Let's not worry about how the Spirit might do that, or what special gifts we think we may need but don't have! Instead – let us together seek to grow more Christ-like through the Fruits of the Spirit.

And together on this day let us know Jesus, who has been attested to us with deeds of power and wonder, and who is the reflection of God's glory, and the exact imprint of God's very being, through him all things are sustained by his powerful word, and he has saved all people and all creation by dying and rising again, and he now sits at the right hand of God and intercedes for us. Come, Holy Spirit come – fill us today.
Amen

Prayer of Confession

O God, we come in humility, confessing who and what we are. We are often unresponsive for we are afraid. When your Spirit speaks, we turn deaf ears, for we fear what you might call us to do. When your Spirit touches our lips, we close our mouths, embarrassed to speak your Word. When the wind of your Spirit blows, we close the windows of our hearts, afraid the breeze will disrupt our ordered lives. When the fire of your Spirit touches us, we quench the flame, afraid of the new life it might bring. Forgive us, O Lord...

May God who loved the world so much that he sent his Son to be our Saviour forgive us our sins and by the power of the Holy Spirit make us holy to serve him in the world, through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

StF 571 – As your family Lord

- | | |
|---|---|
| 1) As your family, Lord, see us here,
As your family, Lord, see us here,
As your family, Lord, see us here,
O Lord, see us here. | 3) Fill our spirits, Lord, with your love,
Fill our spirits, Lord, with your love,
Fill our spirits, Lord, with your love,
O Lord, give your love. |
| 2) At your table, Lord, we are fed;
At your table, Lord, we are fed;
At your table, Lord, we are fed;
O Lord, feed us here. | 4) Make us faithful, Lord, to your will,
Make us faithful, Lord, to your will,
Make us faithful, Lord, to your will,
O Lord, to your will. |

Unknown

Prayers of Intercession

Gracious God, whose Spirit helps us in our weakness and guides us in our prayers, we pray for the Church and for the world in the name of Jesus Christ.

Renew the life and faith of the Church; strengthen our witness; and make us one in Christ. Grant that we and all who confess that Christ is Lord may be faithful in your service and filled with the Spirit, that the world may be turned to you.

L: Lord, in your mercy **R: Hear our prayer.**

Guide the nations in the ways of justice, liberty and peace; and help them to seek the unity and welfare of all people. Give to all in authority wisdom to know and strength to do what is right.

L: Lord, in your mercy **R: Hear our prayer.**

Comfort those in sorrow; heal the sick in body or in mind and deliver the oppressed. Grant us compassion for all who suffer, and help us so to carry one another's burdens that we may fulfil the law of Christ.

L: Lord, in your mercy **R: Hear our prayer.**

Receive our thanks and praise for all who have served you faithfully here on earth, and especially those who have revealed to us your grace in Christ. May we and all your people share the life and joy of your kingdom; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **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.**

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours now and for ever. **Amen.**

StF 410 – Lord your church on earth is seeking

- 1) Lord, your church on earth is seeking
Your renewal from above;
Teach us all the art of speaking
With the accent of your love.
We would heed your great commission:
Sending us to every place -
Preach, baptize, fulfil my mission,
Serve with love and share my grace.
- 2) Freedom give to those in bondage,
Lift the burdens caused by sin.
Give new hope, new strength and courage,
Grant release from fears within:
Light for darkness; joy for sorrow;
Love for hatred; peace for strife.
These and countless blessings follow
As the Spirit gives new life.
- 3) In the streets of every city
Where the bruised and lonely dwell,
Let us show the Saviour's pity,
Let us of his mercy tell.
In all lands and with all races
Let us serve, and seek to bring
All the world to render praises,
Christ, to you, Redeemer, King.

Hugh Sherlock © Successors to Hugh Sherlock CCL No. 515642

Offering Prayer

God of Amazement and Wonder, on this day of Pentecost, we celebrate the power of the Holy Spirit seen in everyday miracles of simple acts of love experienced all around us, for all things are possible with you. We recognise that all we are is a gift from you. Take us and this offering and work miracles we pray... Come Holy Spirit, come! **Amen.**

Blessing

May the Spirit, who set the Church on fire on the Day of Pentecost, bring our world alive with the love of the risen Christ. Go in Christ's name to live for his glory. **Amen.**