

A service for 8th June, 2025 – Pentecost (StF)

Call to Worship: Joel chapter 2 verses 28 and 29

“And afterward, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days.” Amen.

We shall sing a hymn by Margaret Old, which is set to The Skye Boat Song. Hymn number 394, ‘Spirit of God, unseen as the wind,’

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.

1. 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. *Chorus*

2. Without your help we fail our Lord,

We cannot live his way;

We need your power, we need your strength,

Following Christ each day. *Chorus*

© Margaret V. Old (1932 – 2001)

Let us pray.

Almighty and eternal God, we come to celebrate your great gift of the Holy Spirit, who led to the birth of the Church two thousand years ago. You are the Lord of creation, the maintainer of life and our Saviour. Your might and wisdom are as boundless as your redemptive love, for, despite our sinfulness, hopelessness and helplessness, you have always sought to draw us into the closest of relationships where we are your earthly children, a royal priesthood. Not only have you achieved this through the life, death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, but through the gift of the Holy Spirit, who is our guide, strength and comforter in our discipleship. May we pray to you in faith, sing your praise with gratitude, and listen to your word with eagerness, for you alone are worthy of our praise and thanksgiving.

Heavenly Father accept our heartfelt thanks for all that you do for us and for every blessing we receive from you. Thank you for this wonderful planet upon which we live, the beauty of land sea and sky, for people who care for us, guide and inspire us, for opportunities and experiences that fulfil our lives, but most of all for your boundless grace upon which we depend. Help us to worship you in spirit, love and truth in the precious name of Jesus. Amen.

In our prayer of confession, when I say, ‘Merciful Lord’, please respond with, ‘Restore us to righteousness’.

Almighty God, you are holy and righteous, whereas we are deeply flawed and sinful. Even when we try our best to live as you call us to, we fall short of what we ought to be. Forgive us when we are selfish or self-righteous, unforgiving and judgmental. Pardon us when we have been unwilling to trust in your saving grace.

‘Merciful Lord’ ‘restore us to righteousness’.

Help us to change our ways as we acknowledge our sinfulness. Renew and restore us, so our lives reflect the victory Jesus has won over sin and death. Re-kindle the embers of our faith, so we may play our part in building your kingdom here.

‘Merciful Lord’ ‘restore us to righteousness’.

Loving God, we believe that you have heard our prayer and have not only pardoned us, but invite us to walk with you once more. Hereafter, may the Holy Spirit enable us to serve you and our neighbours gladly and faithfully, so our lives honour you in Jesus’ beautiful name. Amen.

As our Saviour taught his disciples, we pray:

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.

“Breathe on me, Breath of God, / Till I am wholly thine, / Until this earthly part of me / Glows with thy fire divine.” Edwin Hatch’s words remind us of Cleopas and his friend and, of course, John Wesley, whose heart was ‘strangely warmed’ at Aldersgate Street on Pentecost, 1738. We shall sing hymn number 370, ‘Breathe on me, Breath of God;’

**1. 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.**

**2. Breathe on me, Breath of God;
Until my heart is pure.
Until with thee I will one will,
To do and to endure.**

**3. Breathe on me, Breath of God;
Till I am wholly thine,
Until this earthly part of me
Glows with thy fire divine.**

**4. Breathe on me, Breath of God;
So shall I never die,
But live with thee the perfect life
Of thine eternity.**

© Edwin Hatch (1835 – 1889)

We come now to our prayers of intercession for people nearby and far away. Let us pray.

Loving God, although we live on a wonderful and self-sustaining planet, because of improved communications, we hear about so much pain and suffering, here and abroad, that we are driven to despair, especially as so many of the issues result from humankind’s failure to care for our neighbours. Whilst we offer ourselves to play what part we can in repairing some of the brokenness around us, we know that our powers are limited. Nevertheless, we believe that all things are possible for you, so we pray that you will inspire and warm the hearts of people with greater power and influence, so they will bring about changes rectify the results of mankind’s cruelty, folly, exploitation and indifference.

As we celebrate the birth of the Church in the power of the Holy Spirit, we pray for our church, all the churches in our Circuit and, indeed, for the World Church. May the living Spirit rekindle our desire to share good news with our neighbours, both local and further afield, not only in words but through acts of grace. Teach us to speak of the grace

and glory of Christ Jesus with one voice and serve him in unity of mission, so we bring others to know and serve our Lord Jesus.

Heavenly Father, we grieve that wars are currently being waged in Ukraine, the Holy Land, Myanmar, Congo, Somalia and Sudan with all the suffering, destruction, death and displacement that results from mankind's inability to co-exist with neighbours. We see pictures of the suffering of civilians, all too-often children as they face heavy bombardment and deprivation of the essentials for life, which are all the more appalling as we commemorate the eightieth anniversary of the end of the Second World, yet seem to have failed to learn the means of co-existing in peace. May the living Spirit help the leaders of all nations to recognize that 'jaw-jaw is better than war-war'. May the Holy Spirit bring about just and lasting settlements to the conflicts we have named and for your shalom to be bestowed on all nations.

Jesus is the Lord of shalom, the source of healing and well-being, so we pray for people who are ill in body, mind or spirit, for those brought low by loneliness, fear or need and everybody who is experiencing the agony of bereavement. Wherever possible, Lord, empower us to offer support and friendship to them. In a time of silence, we remember friends and neighbours for whom we are especially concerned..... Loving Lord, embrace them with the warmth and power of your love, so they may be healed, encouraged, granted reassurance and enduring peace.

Abba, Heavenly Father, bless us, our families and friends. Keep us safe in your care. May the Holy Spirit guide and strengthen us in our discipleship, guiding us by the example of Jesus Christ and sharing the love you give in such abundance with all-comers, trusting in your grace and goodness evermore. Amen.

Our next hymn was written by a Presbyterian minister, Revd. Daniel Iverson, for a revivalist campaign in Florida during 1926. We remain seated as we sing hymn number 295, 'Spirit of the living God'. We shall sing it twice, please.

Spirit of the living God,

Fall afresh on me.

Spirit of the living God,

Fall afresh on me.

Break me, melt me,

Mould me, fill me.

Spirit of the living God,

Fall afresh on me.

© Daniel Iverson (b. 1890)

Our reading is Acts chapter 2 verses 1 to 21

When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.

Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven. When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard them speaking in his own language. Utterly amazed, they asked: "Are not all these men who are speaking Galileans? Then how is it that each of us hears them in his own native language? Parthians, Medes and Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene; visitors from Rome (both Jews and converts to

Judaism); Cretans and Arabs—we hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!” Amazed and perplexed, they asked one another, “What does this mean?”

Some, however, made fun of them and said,
“They have had too much wine.”

Then Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice and addressed the crowd:
“Fellow Jews and all of you who live in Jerusalem, let me explain this to you; listen carefully to what I say. These men are not drunk, as you suppose. It’s only nine in the morning! No, this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel:

“‘In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people.

Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy. I will show wonders in the heaven above and signs on the earth below, blood and fire and billows of smoke. The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and glorious day of the Lord. And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.’” Amen.

Our penultimate hymn was written by a Nineteenth Century Bishop of Lincoln, Christopher Wordsworth, who happened to be a nephew of the great poet, William Wordsworth. It is based upon St. Paul’s First Letter to the Corinthians, chapter 13 – his hymn of praise for the qualities of agape – God’s boundless love, which is ours to share through the Holy Spirit. We shall sing hymn number 379, ‘Gracious Spirit, Holy Ghost’.

**1. Gracious Spirit, Holy Ghost,
Taught by thee, we covet most,
Of thy gifts at Pentecost,
Holy, heavenly love.**

**2. Faith that mountains could remove,
Tongues of earth or heaven above,
Knowledge, all things, empty prove
Without heavenly love.**

**3. Prophecy will fade away,
Melting in the light of day;
Love will ever with us stay:
Therefore, give us love.**

**4. Love is kind, and suffers long,
Love is meek, and thinks no wrong,
Love than death itself more strong:
Therefore, give us love.**

**5. 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 – 1885}

Address: *‘Amazed and perplexed, they asked one another, “What does this mean?”’* Acts 2:13
Before my address, I am going to refer to the Holy Spirit as a feminine being. Let me explain: although the Spirit is traditionally referred to as male, the word ‘**Spirit**’ in Hebrew is ‘**Ruach**’ and it is a feminine noun, in which case ought we to use ‘**she**’? In Greek ‘**Spirit**’ is ‘**Pneuma**’, but it is gender neutral and I think it is questionable to refer

to the Spirit as **'It'**. Moreover, in Proverbs Wisdom is portrayed as a woman which suggests that King Solomon would agree with me. I invite you to think about my argument, but please don't let it distract you from the main message.

I was nine or ten when I first heard Luke's account of the coming of the Holy Spirit to the hundred and twenty in that locked room in Jerusalem. The King James Bible was used and I was effectively 'switched off' by the end of the fourth verse. I had this appalling vision of a tempest buffeting the apostles, fire literally burning their heads and this Ghost that made them talk gibberish! It took me several years to understand the true nature of the Spirit and overcome a real fear of her and invite her into my life.

At the Last Supper, Jesus told his disciples that God the Father would give them the Spirit of truth to be with them forever. The Good News Bible translates the original Greek, **'Paracletos'** as **'Helper'** but, as such, it is only moderately effective: The NIV translates it as **Counsellor** while other translations give **Comforter, Advocate** and **Intercessor** as alternatives, yet the Holy Spirit is also a **teacher** and **encourager**. Her purpose is to reveal God's purpose, love and power as she lives within those who obey Christ's call. In Spirit we enter a new, close relationship with God the Father and through her the risen Jesus himself will live in our hearts.

Rather like his description of Christ's ascension, Luke faced the task of describing the coming of the Holy Spirit that first Pentecost. A literal description is impossible, so the writer tried to compare the effect the Spirit had on the apostles in that room. They were assembled behind bolted doors because they were afraid. They had a profound sense of failure and unworthiness and they lacked both the confidence and direction to obey Christ's commission, **'Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation.'** Peter, especially, must have felt his position beyond redemption, because he had denied even knowing Jesus, after he had boasted that he would lay down his life for him. Surely such a weak vessel could never lead a revolution?

However, when she came, the Holy Spirit filled them almost as though God was breathing new life into their bodies. The Hebrew for the **Holy Spirit** is **RUACH**, which means God's breath, whilst the Greek for Spirit, **PNEUMA**, also means the same. So these men and women experienced a new life and Luke's description of the **KIND** of life as being fired up, burning with zeal for God is intended to explain what happened next: they poured out into the street, praising God in ecstatic tongues that Jews from the boundaries of the Diaspora could understand; when cynical Jews mocked them for being drunk, it was Peter who rebuked them, saying, **"Fellow-Jews and all of you who live in Jerusalem, listen to me and let me tell you what this means. These people are not drunk, as you suppose; it is only nine o'clock in the morning."** He then preached his first sermon, as a result of which around three thousand people were baptized into their fellowship and the Church was born in the Spirit's power. There are many examples of how the Spirit can inspire ordinary people to do extraordinary things.

At Pentecost seventeen hundred years later, the Spirit 'strangely warmed' John Wesley's heart at a gathering of Moravians at Aldersgate Street, convincing him that his sinfulness had been expunged through faith in Christ, freeing him to serve the Lord as a response to his grace, rather than having to earn God's favour and forgiveness by good works. He received a vision of social holiness that sent him out into the community, across the country, to serve people who had effectively been abandoned by the church as irredeemable.

The Wesleys and their followers, not only preached good news, but established classes in host communities where members supported one another, studied the Bible and worshipped together and engaged in social reform. It was hard work, especially as

early Methodists faced opposition from the Establishment and parts of the Church of England, particularly after John Wesley, rather than bishops, began to ordain ministers and appointed Francis Asbury as a Bishop in America. This of course led to the founding of the Methodist Church, rather than it remaining within the Church of England. It is worth noting that some historians believe that the growth of Methodism prevented the revolutions and social upheavals that afflicted much of Europe in the first half of the Nineteenth Century, because of its striving for social reform within our social constitution. Lest you think that the Holy Spirit is confined to the dust of history, I am going to finish with an example of her power in the 1950s in the case of Doris Brown.

Doris Brown was a remarkable woman. For a start, she was six feet six inches tall and had a wonderful sense of humour. She went to China as a missionary in the late 1940s, after the Second World War. However, in 1949, Mao Tse Tung came to power with the Chinese Communist Party and banned all religions throughout China. As a result of this dictate, Doris was arrested by the Communists and was questioned for hours in a process known as 'brainwashing'. The questions were aimed to confuse and scare Doris into abandoning her faith, so she would abandon her ministry.

In the middle of her confusion and distress, Doris remembered Jesus' remarkable promise concerning the Holy Spirit, **"But when they arrest you, do not worry about what to say, or how to say it. At that time, you will be given what to say, for it will not be you speaking, but the spirit of your Father speaking through you"**, so she asked God for words for her to say. In response, the Holy Spirit guided Doris to recite the Apostles' Creed, clause by clause in answer to each question she faced. Let me explain what I mean:

When asked the first question, Doris replied, **"I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth."** When asked the second question, she answered, **"I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried; he descended to the dead."** To the third, she replied, **"On the third day he rose again; he ascended into heaven, he is seated at the right hand of the Father, and he will come to judge the living and the dead."** To the next question, Doris stated, **"I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen."** I can imagine the confusion her answers caused amongst her interrogators.

When they asked further questions, Doris went through the Creed again. Since Creed means Belief, Doris was telling her questioners what she believed in, not what they wanted to hear. The Secret Police were confused and frustrated by her replies. After a while, they gave up and, soon afterwards, Doris was deported and returned to England with her faith as strong as ever.

As Twenty-first Century disciples, the Holy Spirit challenges us to pick up the mantle passed from St. Peter to John Wesley and Doris Brown: we are called to serve all-comers, not just fellow-Christians, just as Jesus reached out to Gentiles, outcasts and even Samaritans. No one is outside the scope of God's love – even people we find it hard to like – and the needs of our world are great indeed. **In the power of the Holy Spirit we must let the light of God's love shine from our actions, for only when we live out our faith will others hear and respond to our message of salvation and turn to Christ. Amen.**

Our closing hymn, written by Brian Wren, reminds us that the Holy Spirit is not trapped in ancient history, but He / She works in and through us now and always, if we let Her. Incidentally, I much prefer the version of this hymn in “Hymns and Psalms” and can’t understand the revision. Hymn number 398, “There’s a Spirit in the air,”

1. There’s a spirit in the air,
Telling Christians everywhere:
Praise the love that Christ revealed,
Living, working, in our world.
2. Lose your shyness, find your tongue;
Tell the world what God has done:
God in Christ has come to stay;
Live tomorrow’s life today!
3. When believers break the bread,
When a hungry child is fed,
Praise the love that Christ revealed,
Living, working, in our world.
4. Still his Spirit leads the fight,
Seeing wrong and setting right:
God in Christ has come to stay;
Live tomorrow’s life today!
5. When a stranger’s not alone,
Where the homeless find a home,
Praise the love that Christ revealed,
Living, working, in our world.
6. May his Spirit fill our praise,
Guide our thoughts and change our ways:
God in Christ has come to stay;
Live tomorrow’s life today!
7. There’s a Spirit in the air,
Calling people everywhere:
Praise the love that Christ revealed,
Living, working, in our world.

© *Brian A. Wren {born 1936}*

Benediction

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