

A service for Pentecost – 24th May, 2026 (StF)

Call to worship: Joel Ch. 2 verses 28 to 32a

"And afterwards, 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.

I will show wonders in the heavens and on the earth, 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 dreadful day of the LORD. And everyone who calls on the name of the LORD will be saved." Amen.

Our opening 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 398, '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 (1890 - 1977)

Let us pray

We come to you, O God, on this day of Pentecost, to offer our praise and adoration, for you, Lord, are all that is life. It was you whose Word brought creation into being and its wonders and beauty amaze us. You, Lord, are all that is life, for it was the Word who became flesh and lived among us in Jesus, full of grace and truth. You Lord are all that is life, for you breathed the Word and he came among us, giving life, enthusiasm, love and meaning. Therefore, we come to worship and adore you, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, new every moment, yet still the same. O loving heavenly Father, may your love burn within us, for you are our God and our times are in your hand.

You Lord are all that is life and you have blessed us throughout our life. Accept our thanks for the good things we enjoy, for people who have brought us love, light and guidance and also the opportunities and experiences that have fulfilled us, but above all things, thank you for loving us so much that you came as our Redeemer and friend.

Yet as we offer our praise and acknowledge your holiness, we are aware of our own failings. Forgive us, loving Creator, for our failure to delight in the variety and differences of people, for imagining that everyone should be the same and like us, thereby limiting your love which is offered to all-comers. Forgive us, Lord of all, for failing to challenge those who mistreat others, for our lack of will in our search for justice, thus limiting your Spirit, who would bring unity to our society and our world. Forgive us, Creator God, for being afraid to take the first step, for not wanting to reach out to those in need or distress, so limiting your Son, Christ Jesus, who gave himself for all as our Lord of love.

The God who spoke and breathed and lives declares, 'Behold, I make all things new.' He forgives our sins and offers us a new beginning through his boundless grace. Thanks be to God. Amen.

We shall say 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.

We continue our worship as we sing a hymn by Revd. Michaela Youngson, President of the Methodist Conference in 2018. She was born in Cornwall, raised in Yorkshire and trained for the Ministry at Queens, Birmingham. She is an author, broadcaster and, importantly, has written a splendid hymn, which we shall now sing! Hymn number 399, 'When deep despair casts out all light'.

1. When deep despair casts out all light

And hope is wearing thin;

Come Spirit, dance with gentle grace,

Shine through the dullness we embrace

And make the colours sing;

And make the colours sing.

2. When greed dictates that children die

And poverty holds sway;

Come Spirit, burn as living flame,

Prompt us to act to end this shame;

Cast apathy away;

Cast apathy away.

3. When colour, lifestyle, creed or name

Cause groundless hate and fear;

Come Spirit, weave a web of peace,

That prejudice and violence cease;

Reveal God's purpose here;

Reveal God's purpose here.

4. When guilt and fear tear us apart

And faith's a bitter thing;

Come Spirit, dance with gentle grace,

Shine through the dullness we embrace

And make the colours sing;

And make the colours sing.

© Michaela Youngson

We come to our prayers of intercession for people nearby and far away. Let us pray. When I say, 'Lord in your mercy' please answer 'Hear our prayer'.

Almighty God, like the first apostles, we hear your call to be bearers of good news to this beautiful but broken world. Grant us the might of you Holy Spirit, so we may serve you as you want us to by helping our neighbours and acting as your earthly hands, offering comfort, friendship and hope in Jesus' name. Keep us active and diligent in our service, even if this means we are led from our comfort zone. We know that some situations are beyond our scope, but nothing is impossible for you, so we pray that you will heal our

wounded world as we acknowledge that human failure to live as you call us to is responsible for a great deal of its suffering.

‘Lord in your mercy’ **‘Hear our prayer’**

Lord of all, may the leaders of nations govern with justice and mercy, so their people may live in peace. Teach them about the need to negotiate and compromise when disputes arise, to avoid them escalating into warfare. We pray for swift and just resolutions to conflicts in Ukraine, Palestine, the West Bank and Gaza, in Lebanon and Iran, besides other countries where fighting rages. We pray too for victims not only of wars, but of terrorism, discrimination and persecution, remembering Jewish and Moslem communities under attack here in the United Kingdom. Help us speak out against violence, injustice and prejudice, to help build up our communities, rather than harming them. Grant victims hatred and intolerance the courage and support they need to find security and rebuild their lives.

‘Lord in your mercy’ **‘Hear our prayer’**

Hear our prayer for people we know who are ill, recovering from injuries or operations, those who are troubled, anxious or lonely, people who live with a dementia and everybody who has been bereaved. In a period of silence, we pray for everyone we know who needs your help at this time

Help us to reach out to them, Lord, offering friendship and practical support wherever possible, but we ask you to enfold them in the warmth of your redemptive grace, so they may regain their health, find courage, hope and an enduring peace.

Heavenly Father, we pray for people who are suffering the effects of climate change, for whom life is a struggle. We ask a blessing on the outreach of charities like Christian Aid, All we Can, Cafod and Oxfam. May they receive the vision, support and resources they need to help people find security and become self-supporting.

Holy God, we pray for our church, churches in our local Circuits and the World Church. May the Spirit end divisions and unite us in love and mission to bear good news to a world that dearly needs it. May the Christ light shine brightly through our words and actions as we seek to do his will.

Abba, Father, bless us our families and our friends as we answer our call to serve you. May our joy of knowing how dearly you love us inspire us, in the Spirit’s power, to share the abundance of your love with both friends and strangers, so we honour you in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

We shall sing a hymn by Margaret Old with lovely words set to the Skye Boat Song, following the practice of John Bell and Graham Maule of setting hymns to old ballads. 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)

The New Testament 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 Edwin Hatch in 1878, but not used for public worship until 1886. His words, "Breathe on me, Breath of God, / Till I am wholly thine, / Until this earthly part of me / Glows with thy fire divine" may remind us of Cleopas and his friend and, of course, John Wesley, whose heart was 'strangely warmed' at Aldersgate Street on Pentecost, 1738. May the same Spirit warm our hearts, too. We shall continue our worship as we 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
Glow 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)

Sermon: *“Amazed and perplexed, they asked one another, “What does this mean?” Acts 2:12*

In Acts, Luke recorded how, around two thousand years ago, a hundred and twenty helpless, hopeless, frightened failures were transformed by the power of the Holy Spirit. These followers had been instructed by Jesus to await the coming of the Spirit. They were assembled in a bolted room because Jesus had recently ascended and they were afraid of the Jewish religious establishment. They certainly felt inadequate to fulfil Christ’s commission, **‘Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation’**. After all, the disciples had been slow to understand Jesus’ teachings, had deserted Christ in his hour of need, had rejected the women’s news of the resurrection, only accepting it when Jesus appeared in person. Although Jesus’ subsequent appearances had filled the hundred and twenty with joy, they must have doubted how such weak, ignorant failures could do what Jesus had commanded?

Jesus provided the answer at the Last Supper when he promised, **‘I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counsellor to be with you forever—the Spirit of truth’**, adding, **‘the Counsellor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you’**. It is worth noting that the **Holy Spirit** in Hebrew is **Ruach – the breath of God**. It is also noteworthy that Ruach is feminine, so whilst we traditionally call the Spirit **‘him’**, strictly-speaking we ought to say **‘her’**! Luke could only use similes to describe what happened that Pentecost, because the actual event was indescribable, but description of something like a violent wind filling the room can help us visualise God breathing power into everybody there. The tongues of fire represent the resulting enthusiasm and desire in the assembly, rather like the **‘strange warming’** of John Wesley’s heart at Aldersgate Street on 24th May, 1738. Indeed, the hearts of the hundred and twenty followers were warmed so much they seemed drunk with joy. Moreover, they received the gift of communicating with Jews from the Diaspora throughout the known world – **truly a reversal of Babel!**

To the amazement of all who saw them, the apostles were as bold then as they’d been afraid less than an hour earlier. Jews from remote parts of Roman Empire 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? We hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!”** Amazed and perplexed, they asked one another, **“What does this mean?”** Their reference to Galileans reflected a common prejudice against a province which had many Gentiles living there and so was considered an unworthy place to come from. Certainly, they believed no prophet could come from there, let alone the Messiah, for Galileans were deemed too ignorant and uncultured. Despite the crowd’s prejudice, here

was a group of Galileans who were able to speak their languages fluently. Nevertheless, some scoffed that they were drunk, to which Peter retorted that it only nine-thirty in the morning and then preached his first sermon – after which 3000 men, not counting women and children were baptised in the name of Christ Jesus.

Jesus told his followers, **‘Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.’** The word **‘peace’**, a translation of the Greek **‘eirene’**, is similar to **‘Shalom’** in Hebrew. It means **blessing, fulfilment** as well as **inner peace**, borne out of trusting Jesus. Remember, this was the hour when the Church was born, **not sickly & feeble, but so dynamic it frightened the Roman Empire**, the superpower of its age, so much that measures were taken to destroy all who proclaimed, **“Jesus is Lord”!** That’s not bad work for a hundred and twenty former backsliders, is it?

The Holy Spirit doesn’t just belong to ancient history: she’s evident in today’s world, too, if only we’re perceptive enough to recognise her. The Spirit certainly guided Oscar Romero, who became a Roman Catholic priest in El Salvador in South America during 1942 and was elected bishop in 1970. It was not a popular appointment, because Bishop Romero was considered a conservative priest and supporter of Opus Dei. In 1977, he became Archbishop of San Salvador and surprised his critics by making clear the importance he attached to social justice. The Spirit had moved in him. During that decade, a terrible civil war broke out in El Salvador with many innocent people killed by the army and death squads without fear of being punished. Many in the Government believed that the Catholic Church in El Salvador was involved in fighting against the State, so between 1977 and 1980, 6 priests were killed, 5 kidnapped and tortured, 9 fled the country, and 12 were forcibly expelled.

After his close friend and Jesuit, Rutilio Grande, was assassinated, Oscar Romero's Sunday sermons, detailing human rights violations, were broadcast throughout the country, openly criticizing the Government. His sermons and pastoral letters strongly supported the right of poor peasants to organize, although he consistently condemned the use of violence. He successfully helped to free victims of a number of kidnappings and although he frequently received death threats, Bishop Romero continued to speak out against the persecution and killings in El Salvador. He must have known the consequences of his position, but he was undeterred in his advocacy of social justice.

However, in March 1980, as Oscar Romero finished taking Holy Communion at the Cathedral, gunmen opened fire and killed him. His death had great effect throughout the Roman Catholic world and beyond, with Romero standing out as an “apostle” of human rights. He was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize and his courage in the face of oppression is an example for all.

The Spirit lives within each of us. We’re heirs of the peace Jesus gave his disciples. The gift is free, so let us take it, find blessing, fulfilment and a peace that passes all understanding, for if we do, there’s nothing in the present or future that should trouble our hearts, for Christ is with us. If we let our hearts be warmed to serve Jesus in response to his sacrificial love for us, then the Spirit will lead us to a greater understanding of God’s word and she will empower us as we seek to serve Christ’s call. The Spirit-led Church is both **evolutionary and revolutionary** and must be both if it is to survive, so let us embrace change, whilst holding on to the essential truths. Let’s trust in the One who trusted his Father would raise him from death, as well as in the empowering gift of the Holy Spirit. **Let**

us unbolt the doors of our fears and embrace the world beyond it with His redemptive love. Amen.

At Pentecost, I could hardly omit a hymn by Charles Wesley – and I won't! Our final hymn was written by Charles Wesley in 1746, for a hymnal entitled, "Hymns of Petition and Thanksgiving for the Promise of the Father", otherwise called "Hymns for Whit Sunday". We shall close our worship as we sing Hymn number 378, 'Father of everlasting grace'.

1. Father of everlasting grace,
Your goodness and your truth we praise,
Your goodness and your truth we prove;
You have, in honour of your Son,
The gift unspeakable sent down,
The Spirit of life and power, and love.

2. Send us the Spirit of your Son,
To make the depths of Godhead known,
To make us share the life divine;
Send him the sprinkled blood to apply,
Send him our souls to sanctify,
And show and seal us with this sign.

3. So shall we pray and never cease,
So shall we thankfully confess
Your wisdom, truth, and power, and love,
With joy unspeakable adore,
And bless and praise you evermore,
And serve you as your hosts above:

4. Till, added to that heavenly choir,
We raise our songs of triumph higher,
And praise you with a bolder voice,
Out-soar the first-born seraph's flight,
And sing, with all our friends in light,
Thy everlasting love rejoice.

© Charles Wesley {1707 – 1788} StF version

Benediction

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