

Pentecost 2021
Letter to the Vale of Stour Churches

Greetings in the name of Christ.

As we approach Pentecost and the birth of the church through the gift of the Holy Spirit, I have been reflecting on 'spiritual practice' ie those rhythms of personal and church life that sustain us. Wesley called them; 'means of grace...' which are the things that help us make space in our lives for God. In the Methodist tradition these include prayer & fasting, scripture, worship/fellowship, mission & service and Holy Communion – to which I would add the great witness of God's presence through the beauty of the natural world.

Each of these means enable us to connect with God, perhaps through the singing of a hymn, the striking of a chord as we read a passage in the Bible, maybe through the time we specifically put aside to be with God in prayer. The presence of Christ is also found in Holy Communion, when, in an act of faithful obedience that lies at the heart of our fellowship and worship, we participate in, and remember, the sacrifice of Christ for our sake.

Holy Communion was instituted by Jesus just before the birth of the Church. For me, it lies at the heart of my ministry and it is something I have sorely missed over this past year. As one of the great mysteries of our faith, many clever theologians have filled pages debating exactly what happens as we share this spiritual discipline but most importantly, this means of grace is not an academic exercise but rather a real, physical moment that renews and sustains our life of faith.

For many sharing in Holy Communion is an opportunity to see our position before God, our utter reliance upon God's mercy and a realisation that Christ's self-emptying was for us. For others, it is an opportunity for renewal as we are sent out into the world with the strength to serve that comes from the power of love.

I wonder – what does Holy Communion mean to you?

We cannot, however, be blind to generations of folk who now have no experience of Church and for whom this precious moment is



full of words and symbols they do not know or understand. What does all this mean, what is being remembered here and what do I need saving from, they ask? '**Ourselves**' - comes God's eternal reply.

Our Pentecost task must therefore be to seek to re-express this precious act of faith, and indeed all of our faith, in new ways that speak of the heart of the human condition to a new generation. As a friend and addict said to me the other day; 'a fearlessly honest appraisal of ourselves is the first step towards recognising our need for God and for spiritual growth.' This felt like the beginnings of a new liturgy to me...!

Easter is not an end but the beginning of a new story, a new covenant between God and humanity. Easter rolls into Pentecost and the birth of the Church, and here in the Vale of Stour, over 2000 years later I look forward to the opportunity to return to the sharing of Communion in churches, homes, care homes and hospitals.

2000 years of faithful obedience... 'do this whenever you eat and drink – in remembrance of me.' It is quite remarkable to imagine that every day for all those years, somewhere in the world, faithful Christians have gathered and shared bread and wine in order to proclaim and remember Christ.

May this and the other means of grace enable space for God in your lives and mine.

God bless you and stay safe – Rev Alan Combes

A prayer

Come, Holy Spirit, come. Come, Lord, and take over my life for you are true love, love divine. Flowing and glowing, brightness in my darkness, power in my weakness, peace in my troubled life.

What beauty and purity, sweet fragrance and harmony, what splendour and wonder, such joy and glory, Lord.

You are so brilliant and illuming, so caring and comforting, so gentle and renewing, so patient and liberating, so motherly and wise.

You are true love, divine Lord, come and take possession of my soul. Come, Holy Spirit, come. Amen. (Diana Ng-Sutherland CAFOD)