

Pentecost 2020

Hymn

Spirit of God, Strong as the wind

<https://youtu.be/dy8AZ46GKqc>

God bless this home and all who dwell in it

Joined together by your Spirit
we come to worship you
Almighty God
with hearts full of praise,
with minds full of joy,
amazed by your power to stir us
enthralled by your power to hold us
rapt in the mysteries of your loving grace.

We come, open to your love
We come, open to your power
We come, open to your word.
Still our hearts and minds
Remove the anxiety of the day
so we may respond
to the moving of your Spirit
in our hearts
in our community
in our world
Amen

Introduction

What does Pentecost – or Whit Sunday mean to you? Looking back over the years many of us will remember Whitsun as the bank holiday weekend – seven weeks after Easter. It was a day of churchgoing and family get togethers. Lesley Harrington remembers how important it was in her childhood

“Whitsuntide was very memorable when I was growing up in the 1950's. We always had a set of 'new clothes' that mum had spent several weeks before shopping for (even down to underwear). I vaguely remember the crowds and queueing in shops. The Whitsuntide weekend was spent visiting relations to show them our new (Sunday best) clothes, and then parading with Sunday School. If it had been very hot, we hoped we would not get tar off the road on our lovely white shoes!!

Then there were the 'Whit Walks', something not to be missed. We went down to the centre of Manchester for the Catholic's Walks on Whit Friday and the Anglican Walks on Whit Monday. The processions had brass bands, pipe bands and youth bands. I looked on google and found one or two film clips of the parades, lovely memories.”

Now Whitsun rarely falls on a bank holiday weekend and many people have no idea of the religious significance of its origins. Yet Whitsun/Pentecost is the very foundation of the Christian Church and a celebration of a very different style of understanding God and how he works in his world – as we shall see later.

Thanksgiving and confession

Almighty God you promised to send your Spirit
upon all people
the young and the old
women and men
and all nations
Jew and Gentile

Lord Jesus you promised your followers
that God's Spirit of power and love
would come to be their helper,
their consoler, their strength

Holy Spirit

You have

Inspired, guided, challenged
Supported, solaced, strengthened

All who would receive you
All who would give their lives
To serve God in the world

We praise you Father, Son and Holy Spirit
for all that you have done for us
and we confess that we have not
opened our mind and hearts to the Spirit's call,
instead of welcoming her voice
we have been cautious, and suspicious
fearful and have closed our minds.
Forgive us for limiting the Spirit's power in our lives
resisting her challenge,
refusing to see her vision.
Help us to grow in the power of your love
to live and work to your praise and glory. Amen.

Absolution

May our God of love and power
Forgive us and free us from our sins
Heal and strengthen us by his Spirit
And raise us to new life in Christ Jesus our Lord

Hymn

Be still for the presence of the Lord

<https://youtu.be/AKfyudrhGK4>

Collect for Pentecost

Holy Spirit, sent by the Father;
ignite in us your holy fire;
strengthen your children
with the gift of faith,
revive your church
with the breath of love
and renew the face of the earth,
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

First Reading

Setting the scene

Just two weeks ago we heard Jesus promising his disciples that he would not leave them comfortless but would send them a Spirit of Truth. He was talking to them just hours before his arrest, trial and crucifixion and knew that they would feel abandoned and distraught as the events of that night and the following day unfolded. But, even so, it would not be until the feast of Pentecost that the comforter would come.

Pentecost was then another name for the feast of Shavuot, an important Jewish festival celebrating the giving of the law to Moses, the Torah. So, just as the 11 disciples worshipped daily in the Temple and continued in the practise of their faith, they came together to celebrate the festival of Pentecost. All was ready for one of the most important days of the Christian calendar

Acts 2; 1-21

The Coming of the Holy Spirit

¹When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. ²And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. ³Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. ⁴All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability. ⁵Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. ⁶And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each. ⁷Amazed and astonished, they asked, "Are not all these who are speaking Galileans?" ⁸And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language? ⁹Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, ¹⁰Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, ¹¹Cretans and Arabs—in our own languages we hear them speaking about God's deeds of power." ¹²All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, "What does this mean?" ¹³But others sneered and said, "They are filled with new wine." ¹⁴But 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. ¹⁵Indeed, these are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only nine o'clock in the morning. ¹⁶No, 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.

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

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

²⁰The sun shall be turned to darkness
and the moon to blood,

before the coming of the Lord's great and glorious day.

²¹Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.'

Hymn

All over the world the Spirit is moving

<https://youtu.be/UR4tE1kh-mE>

Second Reading

Setting the scene

Jesus had tried to prepare his followers for the future. There was so much confusion about how he was and by whose authority he spoke. While some thought he might be the Messiah, others thought he was more probably a prophet and others still that he was neither, as they were certain that neither a prophet nor the Messiah was to come from Galilee. But his words worried them all, who was this man who spoke of living waters? How was this to come about.

John 7; 37-39

³⁷ On the last day of the festival, the great day, while Jesus was standing there, he cried out, "Let anyone who is thirsty come to me, ³⁸ and let the one who believes in me drink. As the scripture has said, 'Out of the believer's heart shall flow rivers of living water.'" ³⁹ Now he said this about the Spirit, which believers in him were to receive; for as yet there was no Spirit, because Jesus was not yet glorified.

Reflection

The description of the Day of Pentecost is amazingly dramatic – a wind, tongues of fire, and a sudden transformation of hesitant, reluctant, rough round the edges fishermen and workmen into eloquent tellers of the story of Jesus, speaking in the languages of all around them. There is hubbub, there is confusion, there is an overflowing of energy and enthusiasm – for some listeners it's the manifestation of a different sort of spirit – alcohol – but others are listening and understanding, receiving the story of Jesus. The Holy Spirit has not merely inspired them but has given them the tools to tell the story, to convince their listeners, to offer to the world a faith based on God's love.

There couldn't be a greater difference between the original celebration of Pentecost – the giving of the law – and the new – the giving of the Spirit. Jesus had explained that faith in him was a faith of the heart, of a love for all humanity that transcended law. Honest, genuine, profound love removes the need for law. How can you treat a beloved as worthless – how can you steal, cheat, lie, covet, disrespect, kill someone you love, truly love? But how are you to love like that? Through the power of the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit isn't an optional extra of Christianity. It is the driving force, the motivation, the well-spring – it makes love happen. We can put it safely in a box called 'inspiration' and assume that happens to 'other' people – the ones who speak and teach and reach out. It's seen as different and a little bit uncomfortable. In fact, really many of us would prefer a rules-based religion, so we know where we stand rather than the unsettling thought that God might be asking us to do something outrageous – like Jesus did – breaking out of the conventions of the time to speak to women and children and touch the sick.

But actually, the Holy Spirit isn't about forcing us to do things outside our comfort zones – rather she is about giving us the tools to make the most of the skills we have in a way that will help the community around us. She is showing us that our comfort zone can be bigger than we realised.

The Holy Spirit helps us to hear what God is saying to us – us with all our own anxieties and lack of confidence. And what we hear is a request to act within our genuine capabilities. Far too often we accept a view of our abilities that has been determined by other people, maybe by family, friends or teachers. They are often people who are wary and reluctant themselves and assume we must be the same, so they want to protect us from hurt or failure. The Holy Spirit helps us to see ourselves, not as others see us, but as God sees us; as God sees the gifts we

have, the potential we have; the heart of love that we have. And she enables us to make the very best of every talent and skill we possess in the service of others.

But most of all she explains to us how much we are loved by God, just what lengths he has gone to, just for us, and as she fills our hearts and minds with the joy of that love so she shows us how dire and arid a life without that knowledge is. As we realise the wonder of love, we want others to experience, to know God. It is then that she gives us the opportunities to touch other hearts and minds. Not by tub-thumping or leafleting or public speaking but by loving enough to care. Day by day these opportunities arise, to make friends, to listen, or simply to pray. And to quietly let people know that the reason you care for them, is because God cares for you.

Hymn

Come down O Love Divine
<https://youtu.be/flvKDgktutl>

Reading

Once God sang
From Keeping God company
By Trevor Dennis

I preached this in Chester Cathedral at a Festival Evensong during the Chester Summer Music Festival. I wished to celebrate the creativity of composers and musicians, and link it to the creativity of God.

In the beginning,
before the heavens and the earth,
when God and eternity were quite alone,
there was silence

and in the silence of that dark void
God sang.

There was no bang,
no explosion,
no violence,
only a song,
a love song
straight from the heart of God.
God sang out her soul,
sang this universe into being.

She did not need to roll up her sleeves for creation.
She had no fight on her hands,
no slaying of dragons,
no splitting of monsters.
Only a song that took its flight,
soared and circled,
curled the fingers of its wings,

twisted wide its tail,
somersaulted,
closed and dropped and swept again
to turn and turn around the new-made stars.

The universe was and is
God's oratorio,
and this round earth
one delicate aria for soprano voice
(God's pitch is not as deep and thunderous
as we are too often told to imagine).

We human beings
took form late in the song, at bar 99.
By then the waves were sighing on rock and sand,
swinging back and forth to the moon's quiet call;
strange rainbow lights were shimmering the northern
sky,
and whales had composed their song cycles;
wolves were answering the swaying canticle of the trees,
while nightingales were reducing all to tears.

So already,
before we slid upon this earth,
before we stood and lost our stoop,
God's aria had become an Hallelujah Chorus.

God gave us parts to sing,
our own parts,
that no ocean, no wind, no other creature could get its
tongue around.
Lustily we sang it for a spell,
till other ideas came into our heads.

Sometimes we closed our ears
and chose to sing a line of our own making,
out of key, out of tune.

We do it still.

Sometimes we yelled raw from the throat,
barked out ugly melody
that had no measure to it,
and warned all else,
including God,
to fall impossibly in step.

We do it still.

Sometimes we left the chorus lines behind,
built a high podium,
and took a baton as heavy as a truncheon
with which to beat all else,
including God,
into submission.

We do it still.

Yet sometimes,
we sat as still as God
beside a nightingale bush,
and went away and made violins.

And sometimes,
we kept our ears open
to the stars,
to the deep calling of the earth,
to the wide song of the oceans,
went and covered paper
with lines and dots,
writing, 'To the greater glory of God', at the end,
and handed the paper
to those who could take the dots
and turn them from their very souls.

And then, oh, then,
even the nightingales would pause,
the wolves and trees would cease from their duets,
the very stars would hush,
and God would hold out hands to us,
no longer pinned with nails,
but freed for dance,
and she would sway and turn
and swish her skirts
and bend her neck,
and sing with us
and still would sing,
and earth and heaven would then be one,
to call it 'resurrection'.

We do it still.

We do it still!

Oh, let us do it still!

Prayer

God of power,
May the boldness of your Spirit transform us
May the gentleness of your Spirit lead us
May the gifts of your Spirit equip us to serve
and to worship you now and always.

Amen

Creed

Let us declare our faith in God

We believe in God the Father,
from whom every family
in heaven and earth is named.

We believe in God the Son,
who lives in our hearts through faith,
and fills us with this love.

We believe in God the Holy Spirit,
Who strengthens us
with power from on high.

We believe in one God;
Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Amen

Hymn

Silent, Surrendered
Margaret Rizza

<https://youtu.be/vHRwXpOERg8>

Intercessions
Prepared for us by Maureen Noye

Dear Lord on this day of Pentecost may our praises overflow with love. We pray for Vera and her team and our whole congregation that the Holy Spirit will transform our formal act of worship into a joyous celebration of your love. May our worship honour you here and everywhere

Lord You made us, loved us and designed us to live in fellowship with each other may Your infinite gentleness guide us as we pray for our hurting world. We pray for families who are struggling during these very difficult times where love is being destroyed by fear, impatience and anger. We pray for the children living with the consequences of their parents' failure to love and care for each other. May they feel Your caring, healing hands upon them.

We pray Father that we and our fellow Christian's may be ready for any sacrifice and action that will clearly show faith, hope and love to our families, friends, neighbours and those we meet on our journey through life. As we travel through these difficult times please help us to realise how insignificant it is that we cannot get our hair cut or go out for a meal or a drink but that the important thing is we keep safe and healthy. No matter how difficult this period of isolation is Father help us to understand that when we are able to meet and hug our loved ones again the important thing is nobody will be missing

We pray for those who suffer through illness, for those whose sickness is lifelong and cannot be cured, for those with a terminal illness and those who suffer with them and who are feeling helpless. May the breath of the Holy Spirit rest upon them in their hour of need. We pray for those grieving for a lost loved one and whose hearts are heavy and aching and who are finding it hard to cope with their sadness. May they feel the powerful arms of God around them.

Lord You are always there for us, calling on us to show Your peace and joy. You are always there for us when we need You. We come to You for guidance on our journey through life. We come to You Lord because You are the way the truth and the life.

Merciful Father,
accept these prayers
for the sake of your son,
our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen

We bring our prayers to an end with the words Jesus has taught us

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.

Closing Prayer

All through this day, O Lord,
May I touch as many lives as you would have me touch
That you may inspire them with your Holy Spirit
Whether by the word I speak, the email I write,
The prayer I breathe or the life I live
(anon)

Farewell

Lord Jesus Christ

You are the peace of all things calm
You are the place to hide from harm
You are the light that shines in dark
You are the heart's eternal spark
You are the door that's open wide
You are the guest who waits inside
You are the stranger at the door
You are the calling of the poor
You are my Lord and with me still
You are my love, keep me from ill
You are the light, the truth, the way
You are my Saviour this very day.

Amen

Blessing

May Christ's holy, healing, enabling Spirit be with us
and guide us on our way at every change and turn
and the blessing of God Almighty
the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit
be with us and all those we love and pray for
this day and always.

Hymn

The Lord bless you and keep you
John Rutter, the Cambridge Singers and London Sinfonia

<https://youtu.be/QcYzO8Y4PH0>