

# *A Sunday worship resource for church during lockdown*

## *31st May 2020 - Pentecost Sunday*

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*'If anyone is thirsty, come to me and drink.  
Whoever puts their faith in me, as it says in scripture,  
"streams of life giving water will overflow from within him." '*

*Jesus was referring to the Holy Spirit,  
Which those who put their trust in him would receive.  
John 7:37-39*

### **Prayer**

Living God, you are forever doing a new thing.  
You call us to be part of this newness.  
Through your Spirit dwelling within us  
You nudge us to leave behind what needs to be left behind  
And to step out into the road to continue on with the journey.

Grant us the peace to trust and know  
That you will be with us on this next stretch,  
Just as you have been with us on the last.

Give us the eyes to see your new life  
Breaking through the old,  
And the openness to welcome it and nurture it.

We ask in the name of Jesus, our saviour and guide.  
Amen.

*Clare Lind*

**Reading**     Acts 2:1-21

### **Sermon**

When you read Acts 2:1-21 what stands out to you?  
Violent winds, tongues of fire?  
Disciples being filled - not a gentle touch or nudge or brief experience but filled in a way that spills them out into the street!  
The gathered crowd hearing languages coming from mouths of lowly Galileans "*declaring the wonders of God*".  
The response - some are amazed, some ridicule.  
The transformation of Peter, able to speak boldly about his Saviour, and address a crowd large enough for 3000 to say "Yes" to Jesus.  
In twenty one verses there are many stand-out moments.

The passage begins with the phrase "*When the day of Pentecost came...*" For those first believers, Pentecost was an inherited festival celebrating 50 days from when the first fruits of the wheat harvest had been collected (Lev. 23:15-16). Christian history places Pentecost fifty days from the resurrection – the beginning of the greatest harvest. Luke's account in Acts tells us the disciples

(about 120 of them) were all together. It was to be a Pentecost like no other, a day of promise, of power and inclusion.

### **A day of Promise**

Nowadays we celebrate Pentecost as the day of the birth of the Church. It is not the first mention of the Holy Spirit in scripture's pages, far from it. In Genesis 1 and 2 we read that the "*Spirit of God hovered over the waters*" and "*God breathed life*". *Ruach*, the Hebrew word for breath, speaks of God's personal life-giving presence that animates all it touches. In the Old Testament, the Spirit comes on individuals: Judges, Kings and prophets, like Deborah, David, Elijah, Elisha, Isaiah, and Jeremiah. Each is empowered for tasks of leading and speaking on God's behalf. Prophets like Joel speak of a time when God will send the Spirit on all people. The Gospels' revelation of Jesus opens our eyes even further to God's Spirit. All of the narrative of Jesus' life is imbued with the Spirit's movement. In Jesus' miraculous birth, Mary, Elizabeth, Zechariah, Simeon and Anna are all touched by the Spirit's presence. At his baptism and temptation, in his ministry and resurrection, the Spirit is present and brings the Kingdom of God. Jesus leaves the disciples, ascending to the Father, promising to send the *paracletos* (one called alongside to help), the Spirit of truth. And so the disciples wait.

In Acts 2 the Spirit comes not to single individuals called to a lone mission, but to many at the one time. It is an outpouring never seen or experienced before. Like a long-awaited dream fulfilled, the promise has come to pass.

### **Promise fulfilled**

We read that Peter quotes from the prophet Joel and emphasises that this is the fulfilment of prophecy. It is God continuing His plan of salvation.

### **Promise continued**

As we live in a post-Pentecost era, Acts 2 emphasises to us all, that God still promises to be with His people and that all who turn to Him will receive His Spirit. Indeed, as Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 12, we cannot come near to God without the Spirit revealing God to us.

### **A day of Power**

Pentecost was the day the Church received power for spreading the Good News as Jesus promised in Acts 1:8.

With the fulfilment of the promises we read in the Old and New Testament at Pentecost, we see God's Kingdom amongst us.

The coming of the Spirit empowers followers in new ways.

The story of a group of disciples, who only a few weeks before had been hiding away in fear, are now out on the streets, telling the wonders of God's salvation.

Peter, who a few weeks earlier had denied knowing Jesus, is now standing in front of a large crowd explaining who Jesus was and what God was doing through him. Later in the chapter he rebukes them for helping wicked men put Jesus to death.

The change is remarkable!

The disciples' infectious joy in God spills out into the community. It is power that catches the attention of others but is also essential in creating the first church community (Acts 2:42-47). Lives are changed by this power and its witness as they call on the name of the Lord and the Holy Spirit fills them also. The responsibility for each of us is to open ourselves to the transforming work of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit may or may not come with the sound of wind and tongues of fire...but it will change us and enable us to proclaim Jesus to those around us.

### **A day of peace**

In John 20, after Jesus' death, the disciples had been all together in a locked room for fear of being arrested. They felt no peace and little hope. The resurrected Jesus appears to them saying, "*Peace be with you*". He does this twice before breathing on them and encouraging them to receive the Holy

Spirit. Jesus comes to the world to bring peace. *Shalom*, translated as peace, is much more than the end of war. Jesus' call to his followers is to live peacefully with others, to bring peace not just into friendships but every relationship and all of creation. Life with Jesus, filled with his Spirit, offers us internal peace. Paul writes to the Corinthians that *"where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom"* (2 Cor. 3:17). The coming of the Spirit at Pentecost shows us signs of peace – a global party and disciples with the courage to stand and speak. In the remaining chapters of Acts, followers appear peace-filled (and even joyful) throughout the tremendously challenging situations they face. Some may feel, as I did until my late teens, that talk of the Holy Spirit is more fear-inducing than peaceful. It is helpful to contemplate the list of the Spirit's fruit in Galatians 5. These are not the emotions of someone who is filled with anxiety. Do we allow Pentecost to remind us God's Spirit is here to bring calm in the storms, and peace in place of our worries?

### **A day of inclusion**

In God's timing, this event happened when Jerusalem was a place of gathered people. Fifteen different nationalities hear the message of God's amazing work of salvation in ways they can understand. No one is excluded except those who refuse to listen and see God at work. All ages are involved. In a world where people are often excluded on the basis of their gender, age, race, class, or education, Acts 2 reveals the Spirit of the God who speaks to everyone and welcomes all to come. A question for our churches to reflect on this Pentecost may be, "How well are we following the Spirit's example of inclusion?"

### **The Pentecost Challenge**

Our churches today need to walk in the Spirit's power. The old Presbyterian Church in Lawrence, like many others of its era, was built in the style of gothic church architecture. The building was situated in the centre of town symbolising the centrality of Christianity as part of the community. The steeple rose high into the sky so it could be seen from all around, its height symbolic in bridging the gap between God and humanity and pointing to the One whose Spirit renews. The Christendom model of *"if you build a church, make it tall enough for people to see and they will come"* is no longer the case. For many, knowledge and understanding of the Christian faith is similar to that of those early visitors to Jerusalem on that day of Pentecost, unknown or irrelevant. Our world needs a Pentecost faith, a faith that spills out onto the streets with Good News and with experiences of the Spirit's movement and power. We need to share the story of what Christ has done for us. He has forgiven our sins, empowered us by the Spirit, and filled us with peace for all of life's challenges. Like the early believers, we must be available to the leading of God's Spirit to see new ways of sharing the message, and be challenged to think about how we live our lives.

*"Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved, you and your whole household..."*

Andrew Harrex

### **Prayer for ourselves and others**

Dear Heavenly Father,  
As churches around the country join together  
to remember the wonderful day of Pentecost,  
we recognise there will be some who are thankful that church communities  
are once again able to meet together physically in one place,  
as the first believers did on that day.  
Others will be continuing to meet in homes and bubbles,  
connecting with others in worship by the Spirit rather than physically.  
May both be blessed today.

We thank you for being with us over the last weeks,

encouraging, comforting and inspiring us through your Spirit.  
And we thank you for your promise that you will never leave us,  
no matter what new challenges the future may bring.  
We know that your Spirit has great power to change people's hearts and lives for good  
and that your presence can bring joy and peace to all situations.

Today, we ask for peace upon those who have lost jobs recently  
and who are worrying about their financial security.  
We ask that you provide for their needs and guide them  
as they make decisions about what to do next.  
Please inspire those around them to be understanding and generous  
and show love to their neighbours,  
and please also guide our government officials as they make decisions about financial aid  
- may sufficient aid come to those who most need it.

We ask that you comfort the elderly in rest homes who are feeling confused,  
or lonely and isolated with few visits from family.  
Please surprise them with joy in unexpected ways,  
and give them patience and contentment as they wait for more freedom.

Please also take care of those affected by the current drought in New Zealand.  
We ask for rain to fall and grass and crops to flourish.  
Please refresh the land and bring hope and security where there is worry and despair.

We ask your blessing on the people affected by the recent attack  
on the maternity hospital in Kabul.  
Please be with the families who are now caring for motherless newborn babies,  
while also grieving the loss of their wives, daughters, and mothers.  
Please stay close beside them and comfort them  
with the knowledge you are with them,  
and give them peace and forgiveness in their hearts.  
Please take special care of all of the victims wherever they are,  
and surround that hospital with your protection from now on.

Lord, please strengthen and grow your church as events around the world unfold.  
Help us all to turn our eyes towards you,  
to remember and understand the power available to us through your Spirit  
and to use it well.

Thank you for your amazing promise of salvation  
for any, and all people who call on your name.  
May there be many of them,  
and may we do everything we can to help them find you.  
In Jesus' name.        Amen.

*Bernadine Little*

## Benediction

May the Spirit of Jesus overflow you  
Refreshing you and giving life,  
May his Spirit, in turn, overflow from you,  
Refreshing others and bringing life.        Amen.