**28th May 2023 Pentecost**

**Call to worship**

We come from many places to worship here today.
Across the world, Christians of every nation and language
will gather to worship the same God who calls us here.
The Spirit knows no boundaries and speaks all languages.
Let us open our hearts and minds to receive the Spirit.

**A gathering prayer**

Lord, be here with us today.
Let us hear you speaking
with words we understand deep in our being.
As we hear your voice,
comfort, encourage, challenge and motivate us.
May your Holy Spirit inspire us, unite us and guide us.
Breathe on us afresh.
Renew our hope in your love and resurrection.
Speak new life to everyone,
wherever they are in the world.
**Amen.**

**A prayer of approach**

Praise the Lord, my God! How great you are!
You meet us this Pentecost day
in words and visions and light and flames and fire.
We come before you and you illuminate our need of you,
and your desire that we should know you.
We are transfixed by your greatness and your glory.
Praise the Lord my God! How great you are!

**A prayer of adoration**

Almighty God, your being lightens our darkness.
It melts our cold hearts and warms us to the core.
It reveals truth to us and shows us the way.
It leads us on and speaks in ways we can know and feel.
Almighty God, your being is the essence of our being,
the source of our life, the purpose of our living,
the cleansing of our sin, the justification of your creation.
Almighty God, you are the one we adore –
faithful, unshakeable, for ever.
**Amen.**

**A prayer of confession and an Assurance of forgiveness**

**A prayer of confession**

O God, despite our failings, you welcome, embrace and enfold us.
Despite our deaf ears, you continue to speak to us.
Despite our blind eyes, you continue to show us the way.
Despite hearts hardened to the world’s needs, you always love us.
Despite our uncertainty, you trust us with your message.
Despite our faltering and mumbling, you entrust us with your Word.
Despite the fact that we are unworthy, you see worth in us.
In our wanderings and wonderings, you stick with us.
All this and so much more, O God: you offer us your forgiveness.
**Amen.**

 **Assurance of forgiveness**

We fail you O God,
yet loud and clear you speak words of acceptance
and forgiveness to us:
my child, your sins are forgiven.
**Amen.**

**A prayer of praise and thanksgiving**

On this day of Pentecost,
we give praise to you, Almighty God.
For the glorious gifts of your Spirit:
**we give our heartfelt thanks and praise.**
For dreams and visions of life, light and truth:
**we give our heartfelt thanks and praise.**
For tongues of fire and gleaming light:
**we give our heartfelt thanks and praise.**
For lightening dark corners in our lives:
**we give our heartfelt thanks and praise.**
For warming our cold hearts:
**we give our heartfelt thanks and praise.**
For all you enable us to do and so much more:
**we give our heartfelt thanks and praise.**
For the frisson of excitement your Spirit brings:
**we give our heartfelt thanks and praise.**
For the comfort the guiding the support it offers us:
**we give our heartfelt thanks and praise.**
**Amen.**

**Make ripples**

A visual metaphor for the gospel spreading throughout the world.

You will need: a strip of red, orange or yellow ribbon/fabric/paper for each person.

* Ask everyone to hold the ribbon in one hand and keep that hand down by their side. The leader stands in the middle of the congregation and explains that they will tap two people on the shoulder. Those two then tap two more each; and so on. When tapped, people should raise their ribbon and wave it – as they seek others to tap. Continue until everyone is waving their ribbon.
* Invite people to look around at the effect in its ‘completed’ form. Did they notice how the waving ribbons spread out, like a ripple from the centre? You might like to repeat the process, so that people are more aware of what to do and look for.
* This rippling is like the message of Jesus spreading out from his disciples in Jerusalem to reach all over the world. Display or draw attention again to the Pentecost map – note how the message rippled out on that first day. We are part of the process – it is our task to continue to make ripples today.

**A map game**

**Helping us to identify with people of all nations and languages.**

Each group will need: a map of the world, cards with ‘hello’ in different languages (enough for at least one per person).

* Working in groups, place cards randomly around the map, face down. In turns, take a card and have a go at saying ‘hello’ in the language. Try to decide which country (or countries) it represents. Discuss together what you know about that/those countries. Then put the card in the correct place on the map.
* End by inviting everyone to choose one of the languages and, after a count of ‘one, two, three’, to shout the chosen word(s) out three times. Perhaps the noise and commotion of doing this can be a reminder of the noise and confusion there was in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost.

**Acts 2.1-21**

The story of Pentecost is well known. We retell it every year. It has three forceful images of the event of the coming of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is like a rush of violent wind, or the descent of divided tongues of fire, or like being drunk on wine. The friendly writer of Acts uses the more comforting metaphors of wind and fire – and the unfriendly observer says its more like being in a city centre iin the early hours of the morning – or even Parsonage Street at about 4am on Saturday!

I’m sure you have had many speakers speak warmly about the ways in which the Spirit of God resembles fire. Like lighting a bonfire to see in the dark; to comfort the campers, to warm cold hands and thaw frozen hearts. Fire refines metals, turning dross to ash and purifying the gold. It blazes out of control, terrifying in it’s forest fire beauty.

You’ve probably heard preachers using the image of wind as their choice to describe the Holy Spirit. That soft invisible breeze, whose breath stirs grass and flowers, bringing us the scents of the seasons. It can excite children in a playground on a windy day, leaving them hard to control but full of life. It blows away the cobwebs and stirs us to new life. It can be like gales howling in the wilderness, leaving us clinging to any props so we aren’t blown away.

Fire and wind are familiar images, known and comfortable, with just the proper little hint of living dangerously with God. Because we know the themes well, we can cope with the lurking terror of being out of control with God.

Drunkenness, however, is another matter. It brings to mind loosened tongues, unguarded moments, erratic and emotional behaviour, lurking violence and stumbling, ineptitude. Uncontrolled falling down inebriation is just the start of the least attractive side of the image. There is lost to reality, focused on the next drink, begging in the street, dozing on park benches, shouting at those who stare and sleeping rough, unshaven, dirty and offensive to both eyes and noses..

Being drunk is not an easy image of the Holy Spirit. No wonder Peter moves to correct those who mock the disciples saying they are acting as if they were drunk. Yet it is the third image in this Pentecost story – an image that is rarely commented on. So let’s talk about getting drunk – and how that can be like an image of the work of the Holy Spirit.

The first time I got drunk I was eleven years old. It was at my parent’s silver wedding anniversary party. My parents had an evening do and there was a lot of friends and family. I was a very curious and cheeky eleven year old. Because my parents were occupied in meeting and greeting the guests I felt sufficiently off the leash to go round asking all the guests if I could have a sip of their drink. ‘Aunty Jean that’s a colourful cocktail can I have a taste?’ O alright – but only a tiny sip!’ Uncle Bill can I have a sip of your beer’ – ‘Aye I suppose so – but only a sip mind!’ There were about 60 guests. By the end of the night the disco lights were not the only things to be spinning around the room. I was carried home and put to bed. In the middle of the night I needed to throw up and staggered to the bathroom only to topple over, bang my head on the shower and pass out. I was found in the morning. Sadly my brother was also the worse for wear, as too was my grandmother. The only sober individuals in our house were my mother and father, who needless to say were totally disgusted. I was grounded, big time, by my mother for the best part of, well, twenty years! There is always someone who makes a nuisance of themselves at big family occasions.

In hindsight it may have been one of the better things to happen to me in my adolescence. I learnt very sharply and shamefully that getting drunk wasn’t the measure of being a man but instead it was dangerously foolish. I know many people whose lives and the lives of those who love them, have been destroyed or messed up through alcohol. Enough to know that the image of getting drunk is a dangerous metaphor for describing the work of the Hoy Spirit. You need to take a risk in exploring what the sneering bystanders said about the disciples on the day of Pentecost. But if you stick only with the tried and true images of the Holy Spirit, wind and fire, you may risk missing out on more insights into what God is continually doing in our world.

If we’re honest, we need to admit that the image of new wine and parties and drunkenness are to be found in scripture, Old Testament and New Testament alike. Jesus likens his teaching to new wine, bubbling up, bursting inflexible skins, frothing full of life, beyond containment. Being with him is like being at a wedding banquet where no-one can fast and have long faces, and be sombre – all must rejoice. At Cana in Galilee, John tells us, Jesus is a guest at a wedding and steps in to repair a breach in hospitality. He produces wine in abundance – fine quality stuff.

I did a funeral at the Quarry Chapel this week of a 987 year old who had served in the forces during the second World War. Dennis loved his garden. Pictures in the service sheet showed Chrysanthemums his favourite plant. You can also see those grapes he grew so he could make his own wine; Chateau Tilsdown – that’s were he loived. There are still some bottles lying around the house apparently but for health and safety reasons it was deemed too big a risk to break them open at the wake!

The story fo the wine at Cana is a symbolic story going back to the prophecy of Isaiah in the Old Testament, (chapter 25) where the Lord provides a banquet of finest fare, a feast of rich and well matured wines. When God comes, says the prophet, everything that clings to our lives like death’s shroud will be destroyed, and we will party with our creator. In the new heaven and the new earth you won’t be floating about on a cloud playing a harp -. You’ll be having a party.

All of this background feeds in to what is represented in the story of Pentecost and what the hostile onlookers commented on. Being with God, being in the Spirit is as good as it gets – it’s an enormous party. The joy of the disciples overflowed – the onlookers thought they were drunk. Their joy came form knowing that Jesus was not only risen from the dead – but that they now knew, in a mysterious yet powerful inner way, that Jesus was with them.

I know in my own life I had my questions about the Christian faith – how can you believe it – where is the evidence? I read books about it, went to meetings, asked questions. I found enough to go on that reassured my head – but my heart wasn’t there.

I thought **I knew** that Jesus had risen – but I didn’t **know** the Jesus who had risen.

After being part of worship and praying and reading the Bible and sharing in fellowship I came to that sense of knowing. People ask how can I come to that experience of ‘knowing’?

Who can say – it’s more a matter of being open, doing the right things to be in that place to receive the assurance of faith through the Holy Spirit. The disciples were waiting – together, in prayer, in reflection on the scriptures. Faith usually comes to those who are open, seeking – who wait – who put themselves in the right place.

I’ve done a couple of prayer walks in this last week as part of the Thy Kingdom Come Prayer initiative both here and also at Rodborough tabernacle. Both of us share a joint heritage in the amazing ministry of the evangelist George Whitefield. On both prayer walks I shared how Whitefield came to know the Lord Jesus and have an experience of the Holy Spirit. This is the story:

He was at Oxford University at the time and he was desperately trying to live a devout life. He would go to chapel as often as he could. He read his bible, prayed and did service by visiting local prisoners. He saw all this fervent activity as steps on the ladder to heaven and being deemed worthy and righteous by God. Working hard to be a good devout person.

But he had no joy and no deep assurance or sense of the presence of God.

One day he was crossing a bridge in Oxford and he noticed a woman who was staggering by, wet and crying. He recognised her as the wife of one of the prisoners he visited. The woman cried at Whitefield. She had thrown herself into the river to end her life, but a man had pulled her out and now sadly she was still alive. Her children were starving, she was destitute, her husband was in prison and she wanted to end it all. She begged Whitefield to speak to God on her behalf.

Whitefield took her back to the prison to see her husband. As was his practice he read a portion of scripture to her and he chose John chapter 3. It has that well known verse: God so loved the world that he gave his only Son that whoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life.

The woman jumped up into the air and said ‘I do believe. I won’t perish because of the Lord Jesus. What joy I feel!’

Her husband still felt on the brink of hell and said ‘Mr Whitefield please read the verse again’. Which he did. And then the man too cried out with joy I too have surety that THE LORD LOVES ME’

Shocked Whitefield wondered how could these two desperate people be saved in a moment and discover such joy, when he had spent years trying to be pious and acceptable to God.

He decided to fast even more and double up his practice of prayer and good deeds. He would go out in the middle of night with hardly anything on to pray virtually naked before God until his hands went blue. He collapsed one night due to exhaustion and malnutrition. He was carried back to his room and consigned to bed for three weeks. After a couple of weeks he decided to start reading his bible again. He turned to John’s gospel once more but to chapter 7:

‘Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink. **38**Whoever believes in me, as Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them’

Whitefield exclaimed ‘O God I thirst, I thirst’

At that point he had thrown himself in utter dependence on God. He was at the end of himself. Then, he felt the coming of the Holy Spirit on him. Then he felt a great joy rising up within him. He ceased to struggle and just allowed himself to be born again by the spirit.. He laughed heartily, threw off the bed sheets and ran down the corridor of his student residence and embraced the porter - who thought he’d gone mad. Maybe thought he was on something. His family likewise thought he was insane, drunk in the spirit.

Whitefield would literally go on to change the spiritual atmosphere of this country and the colonies in America. More about that story another time.

Talk of the spirit is always a mystery – there is no formula. Cardinal Murphy O’Connor said that proper talk about God is always difficult and tentative because you are dealing with mystery. Hence the use of all these metaphors to describe the experience of faith and the work of the Holy Spirit – wind, fire, being drunk.

But we mustn’t forget the difficult side of this image of being drunk to describe the Holy Spirit’s work. If we come to the one who invites the thirsty to take a drink, then we will imbibe the Spirit, be under the influence and that means giving up control. Those who get drunk on God have no choice to be unguarded with the Almighty and with one another. We find ourselves blurting out love and holy truth and deep unguarded feelings as we join the Christ like body. A bit of the new wine frees the inhibitions. You may find yourself becoming a little freer with yourself and others. Getting behind your mask: being honest about yourself with God and others, yet still feeling loved and loveable.

Fortified by the Spirit.

Communication is the most powerful sign of the work of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. The different tongues – the ability of the hearer to understand – deep communication – sharing love and understanding – telling of God’s good news. The Spirit is at work.

When people have had a drink or two they may feel a bit generous. It is no coincidence that at major fundraising events they only pass the hat round after the guests have had a few drinks. Being under the influence of the Spirit opens you up to be generous with your time and money. The natural thing is to keep to yourself. Why should you put yourself out for others. Why should you give your money away? You’d have to be drunk!

You might become more sociable – enter into the fun – share your gifts and talents in the party. Paul writes about that in his first letter to the Corinthians chapter 12. The spirit gives us different gifts – all useful. We are all individuals – with different personalities through which the Spirit works – but the Spirit brings us together – unites us like a single body so we work for the good of all – unity in diversity – a bon Amie – like sharing a drink among friends - you come out of yourself.

The apostle Paul describes in his letter to the Galatians the contrast between being under the influence of our sinful nature and being under the influence of the Spirit. Being under our sinful nature we’ll only think about ourselves and our own gratification. Under the influence of the Spirit, we will live in a new nature – showing love, joy peace patience, kindness, goodness faithfulness, gentleness, self control. If the Spirit is the source of our life, let the Spirit direct our lives he urges.

In Ephesians he says don’t get drunk with wine – but get drunk with the Holy Spirit.

 Our focus is no longer on the things that others hold dear. We are drunk on God, on the new wine of the kingdom– we’re open to a new reality, we rejoice in the gift of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Jesus and we gladly seek the gifts that God offers and wants us to share with the world. As we embrace this reality, let us do so in the knowledge that it is a risk that we are glad to take.

Drink deeply my friends of the Spirit of Christ.

Cheers!

(with thanks to Marilyn Parry’s sermon in the Expository times, Aril 2008)

**Prayers of intercession**

Holy Spirit, rain down upon us we pray. Fall upon your church just as at that first Pentecost, when your Mighty outpouring of power transformed lives and ignited the life of the church.

In this country only 45% of people profess to be Christian. Church buildings are being turned into homes rather than buildings of worship. But it doesn’t matter where we meet as a church so long as our hearts are yours. We pray for a reigniting of your fire in all who follow and worship Jesus as Lord and Saviour.

Holy Spirit reignite the fire in our hearts. Fill us afresh with your Living Water. Transform your church.

Come Holy Spirit, with your tongues of fire, **and fall upon us in power today.**

At Pentecost your tongues of fire settled on the disciples enabling them to communicate in all languages. Holy Spirit, you impart the language of love and eternal life. You are not restricted to any race or particular group of people. Jesus’ salvation is open to all.

Holy Spirit, we pray for all who communicate the gospel to the world. Give them words people can relate to and understand. Open ears and hearts to receive. Empower Christmas the world over.

Come Holy Spirit, with your tongues of fire, **and fall upon us in power today.**

Fire signifies God’s purifying presence. We pray for our world to be purified and rid of all the evils of:

* War
* Injustice
* Hatred
* Discrimination
* Apathy

We pray for your hand on China who is being seen as a growing threat to Taiwan and the western world.

We pray for the unsettling influences of Artificial Intelligence in all areas of life and the thousands of jobs in this country threatened by it.

Holy Spirit, fall afresh, cleanse and purify the world. You are more powerful than anything created by humankind. Move in all areas of life and on all continents.

Come Holy Spirit, with your tongues of fire, **and fall upon us in power today.**

We pray for wisdom, unity and truth in our government.  We pray that the voices of all Christians in parliament will be heard. And that they will be effective witnesses in the corridors of power.

Holy Spirit, your power is above all. Transform this nation.

Come Holy Spirit, with your tongues of fire, **and fall upon us in power today.**

We pray for your Mighty power, Holy Spirit on

* The sick to receive healing.
* The bereaved to be comforted.
* The lost to see a path open before them.
* The hungry to be fed.

We take a moment now, to ask you Holy Spirit to fall and move in the lives of those we know personally to be in need.

Holy Spirit, may all in need see and marvel at the touch of your hand. Transform lives in ways never imagined.

Come Holy Spirit, with your tongues of fire, **and fall upon us in power today.**

Holy Spirit, you are the breath of life. Come breathe new life into our communities today. Speak into the lives of the young people who hang about the streets, easy targets for those who seek to groom, manipulate and entice our youngsters into drink, drugs, prostitution and crime. Make our streets safe places to walk.

Strengthen the vulnerable, and purify with your living water those who seek to corrupt.

Come Holy Spirit, with your tongues of fire, **and fall upon us in power today.**

We pray that with each new dawn all creation will be refreshed. Fill us to overflowing that we may boldly speak your powerful language of love and point the way to Jesus in a way others will understand and receive.May the thirsty drink deeply of you and find their lives changed by your Mighty power. Empower and reignite your church this day.

Come Holy Spirit, with your tongues of fire, **and fall upon us in power today. Amen.**

**A prayer for all ages together** Loving Lord, *(hands raised high)*
as we listen your words *(sweep hands out and around)*
help us to hear *(hand to ears)*
and understand. *(point to temple)*
Breathe your Spirit on us *(gently blow)*
and on people everywhere. *(sweep hands out and around)*
Speak your words of love *(make heart shape)*
In Jesus’ name.**Amen.**

**A sending out prayer**

Loving Lord,
thank you that you speak to us in language we understand.
With love and grace, forgiveness and hope in our hearts,
help us to speak to others – with or without words –
so that they might hear you speaking through us.
**Amen.**