

28th May 2023 –Pentecost
Bonni-Belle Pickard and Circuit Preachers

This is the Day – StF 152 (Matt Beckingham)

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Call to worship

This is the day the Lord has made – StF 151

Prayers

Intro to Acts readings

Acts 2:1-13

Like the Murmur of the Dove Song – StF 389:

Acts 2: 14-21

Spirit of God, unseen as the wind – StF 384

Acts 2:22-36

Alleluia, alleluia, give thanks to the risen Lord – StF 295:

Acts 2: 37-42

Almighty God, we come to make confession – StF 419

Acts 2: 43-47

Take this moment – StF 513:

Meditation

Seek ye first – StF 254:

Intercessions

Teach me to dance – StF 477

Benediction

Call to worship – God declares: I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh.
Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.

Prayers – Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful people
And kindle in us the fire of your love; through Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.

Acts 2

2 When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place.

² And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting.

³ Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them.

⁴ All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.

⁵ Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem.

⁶ And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each.

⁷ Amazed and astonished, they asked, 'Are not all these who are speaking Galileans?

⁸ And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language?

⁹ Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, ¹⁰ Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, ¹¹ Cretans and Arabs—in our own languages we hear them speaking about God's deeds of power.'

¹² All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, 'What does this mean?'

¹³ But others sneered and said, 'They are filled with new wine.'

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¹⁴ But 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.

¹⁵ Indeed, these are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only nine o'clock in the morning.

¹⁶ No, 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.

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

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

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

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

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

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²² 'You that are Israelites, listen to what I have to say:

Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with deeds of power, wonders, and signs that God did through him among you, as you yourselves know—

²³ this man, handed over to you according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of those outside the law.

²⁴ But God raised him up, having freed him from death, because it was impossible for him to be held in its power.

²⁵For David says concerning him,
 “I saw the Lord always before me,
 for he is at my right hand so that I will not be shaken;
²⁶therefore my heart was glad, and my tongue rejoiced;
 moreover, my flesh will live in hope.
²⁷For you will not abandon my soul to Hades,
 or let your Holy One experience corruption.
²⁸You have made known to me the ways of life;
 you will make me full of gladness with your presence.”

²⁹ ‘Fellow Israelites, I may say to you confidently of our ancestor David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day.
³⁰Since he was a prophet, he knew that God had sworn with an oath to him that he would put one of his descendants on his throne.
³¹Foreseeing this, David spoke of the resurrection of the Messiah, saying,
 “He was not abandoned to Hades,
 nor did his flesh experience corruption.”
³²This Jesus God raised up, and of that all of us are witnesses.
³³Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God,
and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit,
he has poured out this that you both see and hear.
³⁴For David did not ascend into the heavens, but he himself says,
 “The Lord said to my Lord,
 ‘Sit at my right hand,
³⁵until I make your enemies your footstool.’ ”
³⁶Therefore let the entire house of Israel know with certainty
that God has made him both Lord and Messiah, this Jesus whom you crucified.’

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³⁷ Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart
and said to Peter and to the other apostles, ‘Brothers, what should we do?’
³⁸Peter said to them, ‘Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ
so that your sins may be forgiven; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.
³⁹For the promise is for you, for your children, and for all who are far away,
everyone whom the Lord our God calls to him.’
⁴⁰And he testified with many other arguments and exhorted them, saying,
‘Save yourselves from this corrupt generation.’
⁴¹So those who welcomed his message were baptized,
and that day about three thousand persons were added.
⁴²They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship,
to the breaking of bread and the prayers.

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⁴³ Awe came upon everyone,
because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles.
⁴⁴All who believed were together and had all things in common;
⁴⁵they would sell their possessions and goods
and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need.
⁴⁶Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple,
they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts,
^{*47}praising God and having the goodwill of all the people.
And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.

Meditation: How the Spirit comes

I hope you've enjoyed seeing and hearing the various ways
that our Local Preachers have been trying to tell again the Pentecost story –
As we studied the passage this past week in small groups,
We were struck not only by the variety of how people responded at the time
But by how we each 'hear' the story again two thousand years later.

The Pentecost story is very basic to who we are as Christians –
It describes a pivotal moment in the formation of the early church:
A moment we call 'Pentecost' after the time – 50 days after the Jewish Passover –
When God's Spirit came mightily upon them – *and they were changed* –
And the followers of Jesus became a unified body – a church –
That was to change the history of humanity...

Indeed, Pentecost was a transforming encounter –
The writer of the book of Acts struggles to find adequate words to describe.
He reaches back into antiquity – the popular historic myths of King David –
Images of the ancient prophets proclaiming oracles –
Of fire and blood and rushing winds and ecstatic voices –
Trying to grasp the essence of God's Spirit come upon them.
How do you describe something to someone who wasn't there?
My husband and I both love to go to classical music concerts –
But when one or the other of us goes on our own
And then tries to describe it to the other,
Inevitably, our explanations fail.
"You had to be there..."
But we couldn't all be there –
Time and geography and circumstances can keep us separated.
So still we try to tell the story so others can get a glimpse of what was experienced
And how that experience has changed us.

Some of the ways the gospel writer tried to tell the story now seem archaic to us:
Peter standing to address the hecklers in the crowd probably wouldn't work
today –
We have Peter's words – as they were remembered –
but we don't know how he said them:
Was he bold and assertive?
Was he scolding? Haughty?
Was his tone friendly and persuasive?
When he referred to King David,
did they have a shared recollection of what that meant?
Recently, we've had a King's Coronation –
But not everyone celebrated with the same fervour –
How did the common people hear Peter's words?
Apparently, many decided they needed to change their ways!!!
We too see much in the world which makes us aware of changes needed –
But how are we to let folks know?

The scriptures give us many images for the Holy Spirit – from dove to flames of fire –
Images of peace, images of tumult

Some have described the coming of the Holy Spirit as a tsunami crashing over us.
Another has said we should all wear crash helmets to church
If we really expect God's almighty Spirit to come up on us.
As Methodists, we also have John Wesley's image of a 'heart strangely warmed'
As God's Spirit descended upon him – to comfort, to console –
And to spur him into further action and devotion to God.
Perhaps this spurring onto action is the real test of an encounter with the Holy Spirit –
Have we been enthused/inspired to change our ways,
To re-direct our lives more fully
towards loving God and our neighbours and ourselves?

For some of us, this change might be monumental –
Suddenly we realise that the direction we were headed was leading to disaster –
To complete alienation between ourselves and God.
Most likely, we had found ways to justify that to ourselves:
'In order to get ahead, I need to concentrate for now
On making more money or getting a better job
Or starting this new project or finishing this long-term project
On getting my family member through a difficult time
Or perhaps on getting married – or getting divorced!...'
God just seems to be a distraction...
And yet, the scriptures remind us time and again
That if we put God first, all these things will follow.

Recently I had a conversation with a friend
in which she recalled an incident from her teenage years, several decades ago.
She remembers sitting with friends in a church youth group
And the leader asking them if they loved Jesus enough to follow for the rest of their lives.
She had already been active in her church for several years,
So she realised that, in part, she already took following Jesus for granted.
But, for the rest of her life?
How would she know what the rest of her life would entail?
Would following Jesus get in the way of going to university?
Of finding a suitable – and profitable – career?
Of perhaps finding a life partner?
She remembers the light-bulb moment sitting there in the church hall –
The moment that she realised YES –
she would follow Jesus wherever for the rest of her life.
Decades later, that following has taken her life on an amazing journey –
Many continents, many experiences, a wealth of ministries and encounters.
She hasn't become independently wealthy, and she never married –
But has been full to the brim of love and life and laughter.

Perhaps we keep telling each other our stories – as feeble as our explanations are –
Perhaps we keep reading the scriptures – as archaic as sometimes they seem –
Because here we can catch a glimpse of God's power
And the realisation that God also offers each of us
The opportunity to live our own lives fully attuned to God's Spirit –
Empowering, inspiring, invigorating,
Taking us from what we are to all we can be. God isn't finished with any of us yet!

Intercessions

Lord God of Spirit and Wind and Fire and Joy and Peace and Contentment –

We cannot begin to fully describe all you are

Or understand all the ways you want to come to us.

We can only give thanks for the glimpses we have of your love and your joy.

As we recognise all the grand subtleties of difference in which you have created us –

And all your varied creation –

We recognise as well, the immensity of who you are as Creator.

Your delight in our individuality continues to surprise us.

You who created the whale and the wood mite,

The amoeba and the asteroids

Will certainly have created an abundance of ways that you relate to each of us.

On this Pentecost Sunday, Lord, we pray first and foremost

That your Spirit will once again come upon us

and change us into the people you need us to be.

That you will make your Spirit known to our congregations

So that we will become a people whom others will recognise

As filled with your love and joy and peace.

We pray for the outpouring of your Spirit that will make us gentle as doves

And powerful as a rushing wind

And will warm our hearts to an overflowing of love for you and all creation.

We pray for our communities –

That we might be alert to their needs and ready to respond.

That we might be alert to opportunities to share your love

And invite others to join in the journey towards your heart.

We pray for our families –

For your guidance in times of challenge

For your wisdom is reminding us how to love those closest to us.

We pray for the leaders of our country and other countries –

That your justice and mercy are meted out with wisdom and love.

We pray for those who are struggling with illness

Of body or mind or spirit.

Those who are struggling with relationships.

Those who are struggling with difficult economic circumstances.

Give us eyes and ears and hearts attuned to the struggles

And what healing we can offer in your name.

Come, Creator God: unite us with your creation

Come, Lord Jesus: be with us.

Come, Holy Spirit: inspire us to continue the works of wonder in your world. Amen.

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Benediction – God of power, may the boldness of your Spirit transform us,

May the gentleness of our Spirit lead us,

And may the gifts of your Spirit equip us to serve and worship you

Now and always, Amen.