

**Prelude:** Reflection by Percy Whitlock, played by John Crombie

**Words of welcome**

On this day of Pentecost we worship God, giving thanks for His presence with us by His Spirit within us. And so our first hymn is...

**Hymn** Breathe on me, breath of God

**Prayer**

Lord our God, we thank You that the Holy Spirit has been here from the very beginning, moving over the waters of creation, bringing light out of darkness, order out of chaos, to breathe life into us who were formed in Your image.

We thank You that, true to the promise of Jesus, the Spirit came in transforming power on the disciples at Pentecost to send them out on mission, as Jesus was Himself sent by the Father.

We bless You that the Spirit came, not for a fleeting visit, but to stay with us for ever, renewing the world till all see and honour you.

And we thank You that the Spirit is with us here and now, as we worship, mediating the presence of Jesus, ministering peace, comfort, correction and grace, renewing faith, hope, and life.

Breathe on us, Breath of God. And hear us as we pray as Jesus taught us saying:

Our Father who art in heaven hallowed by 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 debts as we forgive our debtors.

And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.

For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory for ever. Amen.

**Reading:** Acts 2:1-21

Pentecost. The third of the great Christian Festivals takes place today. This is the day when we remember and celebrate the giving of the Holy Spirit to the disciples. And what a day it was. Do you remember at the beginning of the lockdown, how some of us at least talked about what we would do when it was lifted? I think, in what now seems like charming naivety, we really thought that there would come a day when suddenly life could resume as it was before – if we thought at all. I know that a couple of people mooted the idea to me that we should gather the whole community together on the Eilan for a service of thanksgiving, and I, who feared that things would be worse than they have in fact been so far, thought that such a service might have to be a memorial service for those who had died. But of course, as we now know, lifting lockdown is not going to happen like that, and most of us realise why that is. It began suddenly but must end very gradually, as we creep back into community life.

The day of Pentecost was like that first idea we had. It happened suddenly, gloriously, all at once. The disciples had been held up in a kind of lockdown for a few weeks, remember. First of all they were afraid in the aftermath of the crucifixion. Then they were afraid and confused because they had met the risen Jesus but he wasn't staying with them. Some of them made a short trip to Galilee, and went fishing, but then they returned to Jerusalem and stayed indoors most of the time, until they went with Jesus to the hill outside the city and saw him taken up from them into heaven. And at that time they were told again to go back to Jerusalem and wait.

Waiting, as we know, is not easy. Not when you don't know for how long you have to wait. But what we learn as we wait with God is very valuable. In many ways, God can work with us and in us more when we are in the vulnerable, uncertain parts of life than when we think we see our way clear before us. That is something worth thinking about in the days of uncertainty.

Anyway the day of Pentecost came around. This was a Jewish Feast day; Pentecost was the name of the day long before the church began to celebrate it because of what happened this time on that day. It was a feast day and that meant that the streets of Jerusalem were crowded with people, people in from the country towns, people in from surrounding nations where they usually lived, and of course all the citizens of Jerusalem, out on the street making whoopee – street parties would be springing up everywhere, and the roads to the temple would be blocked with people. And the disciples were still indoors, keeping safe, keeping lockdown.

And then, just as you might have heard whistling down your chimney last weekend, there came the sound of a great wind. But it wasn't outside trying to get in, it was inside, blowing out the way. It filled the room where they were, and it must have been most alarming. And then, as if that weren't enough, they saw what looked like flames of fire hovering over each other's heads. And suddenly they knew. Jesus had said to stay in Jerusalem until they were baptised in God's spirit, and they hadn't known what that would mean or how they would recognise the day had come. But now they knew. This was it. You wonder who it was who led them out of their room and down the stairs and into the streets. You wonder who it was who first started speaking about Jesus and how they felt when they realised that they were not all speaking Aramaic now.

Pentecost was the day when the message about Jesus was first spoken to people who had not known him and to those who had known but had not followed him. Pentecost was the day that the church was born, and was born in a wave of mission. Ever since that day, the Church's main purpose has been to tell people about Jesus, and to act in the world in the way that he acted when he walked the roads of Judea. As we seek to be the church in a world which has changed and which is not going to change back to the way it was suddenly, if at all, we should remember that the day of Pentecost shows us the very basics of being church - to go to where the people are and speak about God's deeds of power, and, like Peter, invite people to turn to God.

We are not to speak only to those who are like ourselves: surely that is the message contained in that long list of different people which comes in the story. The disciples went out and found that the world had come to them: we very often find that as well, or we did in the days when tourists could come here. But we also find people who speak our own language but think in ways that are so different from us that they might as well not: and these are not visitors, but the people we live among. Very often these are the people who have got the idea that "The Kirk is no for the likes of me."

We have a message to take to everyone. That is what we are for, more than for any other purpose and as we seek to be church, that is what we need to remember, and what we need to be doing.

**Hymn** Spirit of the Living God, fall afresh on me

**Reading** 1 Corinthians 12:3-13

Pentecost is the third of the great Christian festivals. There is Christmas, then Easter then Pentecost. And each of these festivals has a story attached to it: the story of the baby born in

the stable; the story of the empty tomb and the confused disciples; the story of the tongues of fire and the transformed apostles. Ask anyone about the stories and I think you can be fairly sure that nearly everyone still knows the Christmas story, or some approximation of it. Quite a few people know the Easter story, though they might be a bit hazy as to the details – so were the disciples, so that might be forgiven. But ask anyone outside the church – and some within it – for the story of what happened at Pentecost and you might draw a few blank looks.

Yet it is a great story and a vital story. As with Christmas and Easter the importance of the festival is not just the story itself, but what the story tells us. The story of Christmas tells us that God loves us enough to become one of us. The story of Easter tells us that God loves us enough to die for us and then be raised to life again, signalling that the old order of death and decay is changed. The story of Pentecost tells us that God loves us enough to come to us within, and change us and entrust to us his message of love and change and forgiveness.

God loves us enough to work on us and through us and with us, even though that is difficult. People are hard work. Paul was finding this, when he wrote to the baby church in Corinth. There people had become very excited by the idea of God within – as well they might and maybe we should get a bit more excited about it than we do. They were excited and sometimes they forgot what God within was for: for the telling of God's story and the showing of God's love to the world. Sometimes they got a bit caught up in the idea that God within made them very holy and special – and it does – to the extent that they did that very human thing and turned round the story to be about me. The temptation when we know God within, and when God gives us abilities we might not have dreamed of, is to think about me – that I must be special; that maybe I am more special than you! And Paul cuts through that kind of human rubbish by reminding them that the purpose of God within is so that we can say and others watching can say "Jesus is Lord." No one else matters.

Any gifts and abilities God within calls out in us are all for the purpose of, in different ways, showing that Jesus is Lord. It all feeds back into the mission of the church that they discovered that day of Pentecost when they spoke of God's deeds of power. God within does not make us all the same – far from it: we have so many different ways of showing his power and demonstrating his love. But God within does mean that not one of us can draw attention to themselves, can claim to be more important than another.

We are all, says Paul, members of one body, and Pentecost reminds us that that body has a purpose, which is not just to stay alive, but to spread the good news of God's love in Jesus. This Pentecost, like this Easter, we are still in lockdown: very slightly eased lockdown, but lockdown still. But even though we cannot meet together, though we cannot enter our buildings, our goal and our mission has not changed, and the meaning of what happened that day of Pentecost has not changed either. God grant that with God himself within us, we learn afresh how to take the good news of Jesus to the people who are outside the door.

**Hymn:** Holy Spirit, Fill our hearts

### **Prayers of intercession**

Lord God, as we look out on the world and as we look deep into our lives, we see many places where we know that we need your presence, your power, your guidance and your peace. And so as we have sung, our prayer to you today is that you would Come, Spirit, come.

We pray for this world where the virus still sweeps through lives and restrictions designed to protect also disrupt and cause fear and difficulty. We pray for health and healing, we pray for provision and protection, we pray for compassion, charity and kindness. Come, Spirit, come.

We pray for those who govern us. We know that whether or not we approve of them as people or agree with the decisions made, they need your help. Keep us faithful in prayer for them and for our land and the people who live here. Come, Spirit, come.

We pray for those who miss family members or the company of friends. In these socially distanced days we pray for the lonely and those who find it hard to be alone. We pray for those who are tempted to defy restrictions and pray that compassion and care for our community would remain strong. Come, Spirit, come.

We pray for your church around Scotland, and here in this presbytery, that you will help us to get on with our task of showing and telling the good news of your love. We pray for our friends in the Czech Republic, in Libis and Kostalek, that as they unlock from their isolation, you would help them to continue to take your good news to their community. Come, Spirit, come.

And we pray for ourselves, Lord God, that we would always open our lives up to your filling and live responsive to your leading. Come and fill us, not just for our own comfort, but for the joy of being used by you to spread your kingdom. Come, Spirit, come.

We pray in the name of Jesus, Amen.

**Hymn** O breath of God come sweeping through us

**Benediction**

May the Spirit of God fill you so that you may know the comfort of God's presence and the power to do his will.

And may the blessing of God Almighty, Father Son and Holy Spirit rest on you and remain with you today and every day. Amen.

Postlude: Choral Song, by S.S. Wesley played by Alan Buchan