

ORPHIR and STENNESS CHURCH
Sunday 28th May 2023; Pentecost A
Morning Service 1100
Transcript

Ed. 28.05.23

Welcome and Intimations

Good morning. Wherever you come from today, whether you come regularly, or occasionally, perhaps even for the first time, you are welcome to our worship. Your presence enriches us all in this time of celebration together.

Today we celebrate the coming of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is present throughout creation, and yet is also present inside each one of us. We celebrate the diversity of the Spirit, who spans the depths of the past, the immediacy of the present, and the dreams of the future; who encompasses the whole of creation, yet lights the spark within each one of us.

Gathering Prayer:

In a moment of quietness, let us let go of the cares and the worries of the past week, and know the presence of God among us.

Pause

Great, Creator God, we gather in your presence.
Loving, risen Lord, we are drawn into your love.
Holy Spirit of peace, inspire and enrich our worship. Amen.

Call to Worship:

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

Let us worship God:

Hymn 132 Immortal, invisible

Opening Prayer and Lord's Prayer

On this Pentecost Sunday, in this world of countless peoples and races, separated by place and by time, we remember that we are united as the people of God. We come quietly into the nearer presence of the giver of every good and perfect gift, bringing our worship and our praise, bringing our gratitude for numberless blessings we have experienced in our lives.

We come in thanksgiving for the goodness and mercy that have followed us all our days; for the coming of the Holy Spirit, and, above all, for the eternal Word made flesh who came to live among us in the person of Jesus Christ.

We come with our doubts and our uncertainties,
acknowledging times when we don't know what to do for the best;
with our regrets for things we wish we had not done;
times and opportunities forgotten, abused, avoided;
yet trusting in the love of God, shown in Jesus Christ, and in the power of the Holy Spirit, to set us once more in the right ways.

The following Prayer by Bruce Prewer:

*Holy Spirit, joy Divine,
sometimes you come as a fierce wind,
sweeping away litter which clutters our lives;*

*sometimes you are a soft breeze.
whispering away the worries
furrowed on our faces;
sometimes you are as a deep calm,
stilling our hyper-active thoughts,
and bringing rest at twilight.
Always you are the Spirit of Truth,
hearing our searching questions
with a Love too holy for ordinary words.
Thank you, Sister Spirit,
for being who you are for us.¹*

May the life-giving wind of the Spirit of Pentecost come among us anew;
inspiring us to live more faithfully as joyful witnesses to the good news of Jesus;
renewing and strengthening us
to meet the problems and difficulties and challenges of the coming days and weeks,
trusting always in Jesus Christ, in whose name and in whose words we pray:
*.....Our Father which 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 debts as we forgive our debtors and lead
us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.
For Thine is the Kingdom the Power and the Glory for ever. Amen.*

Readings: *Peter will read for us today:*

Ps. 104:24-34 and 35b (NRSVA)

O Lord, how manifold are your works!
In wisdom you have made them all; the earth is full of your creatures.
Yonder is the sea, great and wide, creeping things innumerable are there,
living things both small and great.
There go the ships, and Leviathan that you formed to sport in it.
These all look to you to give them their food in due season;
when you give to them, they gather it up;
when you open your hand, they are filled with good things.
When you hide your face, they are dismayed;
when you take away their breath, they die and return to their dust.
When you send forth your spirit, they are created;
and you renew the face of the ground.

May the glory of the Lord endure for ever;
may the Lord rejoice in his works—
who looks on the earth and it trembles,
who touches the mountains and they smoke.
I will sing to the Lord as long as I live; I will sing praise to my God while I have being.
May my meditation be pleasing to him, for I rejoice in the Lord.
Bless the Lord, O my soul. Praise the Lord!

Acts 2: 1-21 (NRSVA):

The Coming of the Holy Spirit

When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. 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. Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.

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Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each. Amazed and astonished, they asked, 'Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language? Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabs—in our own languages we hear them speaking about God's deeds of power.' All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, 'What does this mean?' But others sneered and said, 'They are filled with new wine.'

Peter Addresses the Crowd

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. Indeed, these are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only nine o'clock in the morning. No, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel:

"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.
Even upon my slaves, both men and women,
in those days I will pour out my Spirit;
and they shall prophesy.
And I will show portents in the heaven above
and signs on the earth below,
blood, and fire, and smoky mist.
The sun shall be turned to darkness
and the moon to blood,
before the coming of the Lord's great and glorious day.
Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.
Amen. Thanks be to God.

Hymn 194 This is the day

Message:

In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, Amen.

This is Pentecost Sunday.

We all know about Christmas, and about Easter, but maybe we don't know much about Pentecost, except that we sometimes refer to it as '*the Birthday of the Church*'. But Pentecost is one of the great, watershed moments in Christian history, and needs to be fully recognised. In recent times, especially in other countries, the charismatic movement coming from the Pentecostalist churches has been a powerful reminder to the Church to give a more prominent place to what Pentecost might mean for the life and the ministry and mission of the Church as we know it.

Pentecost: the Birthday of the Church: different from other birthdays. This is the "*spiritual birthday of the church*." On this birthday we don't give a present: we receive a present: we receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. That's what we remember today.

Everybody loves a good birthday party, and, the way Luke tells the story of the first Pentecost, it seems that God does too. When the New Testament Church was born on the day of Pentecost, God threw a party – and it must have been some party! It started early, with partygoers being accused of being drunk and disorderly at only 0900 in the morning. and it spread out into the streets, with such noise and joyful shouts and laughter that another 3000 onlookers rushed to join the party.

Remember that Jesus had promised that, after he left his disciples, he would send them a *Paraclete* - a **helper**—the word can mean Helper, Comforter, Counsellor, Advocate. The 120 disciples (Acts 1: 15) had been waiting and praying for ten days since Jesus left them, but here, when the Holy Spirit finally came, it must have been well worth the wait.

A bit of background:

Moses had longed for a time when every believer would receive the Holy Spirit. Prophets like Ezekiel and Joel had promised that that time really would come. John the Baptist said that it would come through Jesus, but then Jesus told them to wait, because the time had not yet come. The Spirit seemed a long time in coming, so that's why the Birthday Party for the Church was such a spectacular event. The disciples were so carried away with joy that other folk assumed they were out of their skulls with a different kind of spirit.

They were intoxicated because they knew that the waiting was over. Jesus had told them to wait until they had '*been clothed with power from on high.*' (Luke 24:49), but Peter felt moved to proclaim on that first Pentecost morning that the promised day had now arrived. As he explained (verse 33), Jesus of Nazareth had been raised to life and lifted up to heaven, and had received the promised Holy Spirit to pour out on all his people. Because of all this – Jesus's life, death, resurrection, and ascension – a new era of life in the Spirit had begun.

As I said last week, and as the scientists among you will remind me, heaven can't be just '*up there*', because, nowadays, we know a little about the mind-boggling vastness of the cosmos, but, as I mentioned, the view of the cosmos that we find in the New Testament reflects the beliefs, the state of knowledge, of these times. which visualised a three-part cosmos with the heavens above, an Earth centred on Jerusalem in the middle, and the underworld below it.

In our church, in our times, we don't tend to make a fuss about Pentecost, so it is worth looking at the background. *Pentecost* was the Greek word for the *fiftieth* day after the Passover. This was the date of a very important Jewish festival, the *Feast of Weeks*, which started out as a simple harvest festival, when the Israelites brought early produce to the Lord's Temple to thank him that there was a greater harvest on the way, but it grew into a celebration of the giving of the Law at Mount Sinai, which had happened *fifty days* after the original Passover at the Exodus from Egypt. That meant that, not only had God baptised his People with the Holy Spirit as he had promised, but he had done it on a special day. The Spirit would enable them to live a righteous life in a way that the Law could not – and we read a demonstration of that later in the chapter. Pentecost became the equivalent of a public holiday.

The disciples were excited. Though we don't take much notice of Pentecost, maybe we should be excited too, because, as Peter tells us later in the chapter, "The promise is for you, for your children, and for all who are far away, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to him." (Verse 39). ***That's us. That's everybody.***

Today's reading tells us about the fulfilment of Jesus's promise: the coming of the Spirit. Whatever it was that happened on that day of Pentecost so long ago, it was a momentous day for the early church. The Holy Spirit came upon the Christian Church in a very special way, and, from that time on, the Holy Spirit became the power behind the life of the Church. Here the promise is fulfilled:

"They were all filled with the Holy Spirit" (2:4).

Even Luke, fine scholar that he was, has difficulty finding words to describe what happened: that sound "like a strong wind blowing" and the "tongues of fire." People "who had come from every country in the world" hear and understand.

Maybe Luke's account has suffered in translation: maybe he didn't mean that the disciples suddenly acquired the gift of speaking in *foreign* languages. The people there that day didn't need foreign languages – they needed only two languages – Aramaic, and the lingua franca, Greek – and most people could speak both.

All this speculation doesn't matter. The important thing is that, by the power of the Spirit, this varied crowd of people were hearing the word of God in a way that they could immediately understand, hearing the message that that God loves everyone; that God's love and God's favour are both totally democratic and unmerited. This was meant to be the end of all exclusive and elitist religion. Sadly, it did not last long. and the divided Christian Church we have today is witness to that.

"They were all filled with the Holy Spirit".

We all believe that we received the Holy Spirit through our baptism, our confirmation, at the Lord's Supper, and perhaps at other significant times in our Christian life, and that's it – we don't need to do anything more.

But I think we *do* need to do something more. We need to ask ourselves, is the Spirit still there? Does it make any difference? Or has it lost its edge? Has the Spirit become submerged in our everyday worries and problems? Do we need spiritual renewal? If we do, we are not alone. We're in very good company. Think of Jesus himself. He knew the tiredness of overwork, the stress of frustration, and antagonism, and rejection. Time and again he needed to recharge his spiritual batteries, and he did that by communion with the Father in prayer. Jesus himself could not do without the renewal of the Spirit. Neither can we.

Receiving the Holy Spirit is not just a 'one-off' experience. It is the beginning of a new way of life in the Spirit. It is about opportunity, not terror; about salvation, not condemnation. Peter needed to go on being filled with the spirit – to get a top-up - day by day. So did Jesus. So do we.

Acts tells us clearly what the gift of the Holy Spirit to the Church is for, and what it's not for. It is not meant to fill us with religious feelings, or give us unshakeable certainty, or impress other people with our power, or even to form us into *The Church*, though it may have all those effects too. The gift of the Spirit is, above all, to allow the disciples, and to allow us, *to do what Jesus told us to do*, which is to be his "witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." (Acts 1: 8). At the present time the Church is much in need of witnesses. And every one of us, in a small way or in a bigger way, can be, should be – must be - a witness to the Way of Jesus Christ.

Pentecost is a reminder, an encouragement, a pep-talk. No matter who you are, no matter your background, or where you are on life's journey, God invites you to come, and to keep coming, to be filled and refilled with his promised Holy Spirit.

"For the promise is for you, for your children, and for all who are far away, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to him." (Acts 2: 39)

Amen. Soli Deo Gloria.

During the next hymn please bring the Offering to the Chancel

Hymn 619 and 620 Spirit of the Living God

Dedication of Offering:

O God, as we offer this money for the work of your church, may we open ourselves to the vision of your Spirit, so that, in being and becoming all that you have created us to be

we may learn to love as you do. Amen.

Prayers of Intercession [or after Dedication]

Preparation:

There is so much to pray about.

The parents of a 10-month old baby have been sent to prison for his murder. His little body had 130 separate injuries before he died. The Metropolitan Police, and the Police in Scotland are 'institutionally racist'. Duplicity and shenanigans among people we are supposed to respect. War continues in Ukraine and Sudan and many other places – and so on, and on.

Note Responses in our prayer today:

L: Come, Holy Spirit, come.

All: Come, Holy Spirit, to your world today.

Almighty God,
as, in the beginning, you brought order out of chaos,
look upon the chaos we have made of today's world.
By your Spirit, may people everywhere learn the Way of life you intend for us all,
and find meaning and purpose and hope in their existence.

Where there is oppression and abuse of others, bring your justice.
Where there is anxiety and fear, bring your peace.
Where there is hatred and division, bring your love.

L: Come, Holy Spirit, come.

All: Come, Holy Spirit, to your world today.

Come, Holy Spirit, at this time of change, even upheaval, in the Church of Scotland,
when many church buildings are threatened with closure;
remind us that your Church is *people*, not buildings.
In all uncertainties assure us again that nothing in all the world
can separate us from your love in Christ Jesus.

Breathe into your Church new life and new enthusiasm for the gospel.
Set our hearts on fire with your love, as you did that first Pentecost in Jerusalem;
in all our diversity, make us one in truth and love. Inspire us to use the individual gifts and
talents you have given to each one of us in the service of all.
By all we say and do, may we bear compelling witness to the Way of Jesus Christ,
so that others will come to know him through us.

L: Come, Holy Spirit, come.

All: Come, Holy Spirit, to your world today.

We pray for all who work for the Church: in the world; in Orkney; and here in this place.
Support all who in any way seek to bring your love to the needy and vulnerable.
We pray for our young people, especially those leaving school to take up employment, or
places at University;
coping with stressful changes; facing many challenges.

L: Come, Holy Spirit, come.

All: Come, Holy Spirit, to your world today.

We pray for all who are ill, at home, or in hospital or hospice;
for medical teams attending to their needs;
for those awaiting results of tests, or facing surgery or chemotherapy;
all those grieving for loved ones, remembering especially the families of the two young people
who lost their lives so tragically in recent weeks.

In quietness, we bring to you those known to us who are in special need of any kind.

Pause

We pray for ourselves:

may the Spirit of Pentecost breathe upon us and inspire us to witness to the world the comfort, meaning and love; the new life; life in all its fulness that you offer through Jesus Christ, in whose name we pray.

L: Come, Holy Spirit, come.

All: Come, Holy Spirit, to your world today. Amen.

Hymn 600 Spirit of God unseen as the wind

Choir: *Blessed assurance.*

Afterthought:

A meditation by Steve Garnaas-Holmes:

Acts 2: 8, 11:

*"And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language?
- in our own languages we hear them speaking about God's deeds of power?"*

.....

At Pentecost we're pretty sure
we did the miraculous talking,
"speaking in tongues."

But what if in fact the miracle was that
those people from every nation
heard in tongues?

What if they had the God-given gift
to *listen* deeply enough to know
the work of God when they heard it,
even in a foreign language?

We think we have so much to say.
Maybe we have something to *hear*.
Maybe the true Pentecostal gift
isn't speaking at all, but listening:
listening in tongues,
letting the Spirit listen through us,
listening in new ways
for what we haven't heard,
listening deeply enough to hear God,
even in the life of someone not like us.

What miracles emerge, when we listen deeply!

And a prayer by Bruce Prewer: Let us pray:

Holy Spirit, we thank you for the gift of the breath of peace,
but also for the less comfortable gift of your fire.

Blessed is the fire that burns yet does not consume,
that thaws frigid souls and exposes them to love.

Blessed the fire that welcomes weary pilgrims at evening,
and for the warmth that gathers opposites into community.

And blessed also is the furnace that softens steely hearts,
bends wills into new patterns of beauty and usefulness,
and, where needful, melts down the arrogant spirit

to patiently begin to shape our lives all over again.
Thank you Spirit of Christ Jesus and our God. Amen².

5 Closing 595 (Tune: St Clement 220) O breath of life, come sweeping through us

Closing Words and Benediction:

Come, Holy Spirit, fill our homes with peace.
Come, Holy Spirit, fill our hearts with love.
Come, Holy Spirit, fill our lives with your power.

Now may the blessing of God almighty,
the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit,
be with you, and remain with you, now and always. Amen.

Doxology:

(Hy. 786) May the God of peace go with us as we travel from this place;
May the love of Jesus keep us firm in hope and full of grace.

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