

BASINGSTOKE & READING CIRCUIT WORSHIP for PENTECOST 31st May 2020
Prepared by Revd Valerie Fisher

Today we celebrate the occasion when the disciples received the gift of the Holy Spirit, as promised by Jesus.

HYMN 564 StF O thou who camest from above. (*Charles Wesley*)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R3UYybc7Xa0>

or <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UIINhxAWXZg> needs trimming

O thou who camest from above
The pure celestial fire to impart,
Kindle a flame of sacred love
On the mean altar of my heart.

Jesus, confirm my heart's desire
To work, and speak, and think for Thee;
Still let me guard the holy fire,
And still stir up Thy gift in me.

There let it for Thy glory burn
With inextinguishable blaze,
And trembling to its source return,
In humble prayer and fervent praise.

Ready for all Thy perfect will,
My acts of faith and love repeat,
Till death Thy endless mercies seal,
And make the sacrifice complete.

PRAYER of PRAISE, THANKSGIVING & CONFESSION

Almighty God,

we remember, with awe & wonder today,
the events of that day of Pentecost long ago,
when you poured out your Holy Spirit on the disciples,
which transformed their lives.

We praise and thank you that you continue to pour out your Spirit in power —
releasing unimagined potential,
imparting unexpected gifts,
and undreamed-of fruits.

We praise and thank you that you come when we are most aware of our need —
bringing comfort in times of sorrow,
courage in times of fear,
peace in times of trouble,
and hope in times of despair.

Loving God,

forgive us for sometimes quenching, obstructing or frustrating your Spirit.
Instead of welcoming the Spirit
we have greeted him with cautious and suspicious hearts.
Instead of gladly receiving your Spirit's gifts,
we have barricaded our souls against change.
Instead of opening our lives to the Spirit's movement,
we have closed our minds to anything which challenges,
because of the narrowness of our vision.
Lord, have mercy and forgive us we pray.

Living Lord,

open our lives now
to your Holy Spirit's life-giving breath,
so that we may live more truly as your people.

In the name of Christ we pray. Amen.

READINGS Both our Scripture readings are from Acts chapter 2. We begin with the account of the coming of the Holy Spirit to the disciples on the day of Pentecost and then read part of Peter's sermon, concluding with the crowd's response to Peter's words.

1ST READING Acts 2:1-13.

- 1 When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place.
- 2 Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting.
- 3 They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them.
- 4 All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.
- 5 Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven.
- 6 When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard them speaking in his own language.
- 7 Utterly amazed, they asked: "Are not all these men who are speaking Galileans?"
- 8 Then how is it that each of us hears them in his own native language?
- 9 Parthians, Medes and Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene; visitors from Rome
- 10 (both Jews and converts to Judaism); Cretans and Arabs — we hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!"
- 12 Amazed and perplexed, they asked one another, "What does this mean?"
- 13 Some, however, made fun of them and said, "They have had too much wine."

2ND HYMN 397 StF The Spirit lives to set us free. (*Damian Lundy*)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HCvYNpzjelg>

The spirit lives to set us free,
Walk, walk in the light;
He binds us all in unity,
Walk, walk in the light.

*Walk in the light,
Walk in the light,
Walk in the light,
Walk in the light of the Lord.*

Jesus promised life to all,
Walk, walk in the light;
The dead were wakened by His call,
Walk, walk in the light.

He died in pain on Calvary,
Walk, walk in the light;
To save the lost like you and me,
Walk, walk in the light.

We know His death was not the end,
Walk, walk in the light;
He gave His Spirit to be our friend,
Walk, walk in the light.

By Jesus' love our wounds are healed,
Walk, walk in the light;
The Father's kindness is revealed,
Walk, walk in the light.

The Spirit lives in you and me,
Walk, walk in the light;
His light will shine for all to see,
Walk, walk in the light.

2ND READING Acts 2: 14-17a, 22-24, 32-33, 36-41.

- 14 Then Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice and addressed the crowd: "Fellow Jews and all of you who live in Jerusalem, let me explain this to you; listen carefully to what I say."
- 15 These men are not drunk, as you suppose. It's only nine in the morning!
- 16 No, this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel:
- 17 "In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people."

- 22 "Men of Israel, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know.
- 23 This man was handed over to you by God's set purpose and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross.
- 24 But God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him."
- 32 "God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of the fact.
- 33 Exalted to the right hand of God, he has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and has poured out what you now see and hear."
- 36 "Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ."
- 37 When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?"
- 38 Peter replied, "Repent and be baptised, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.
- 39 The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off — for all whom the Lord our God will call."
- 40 With many other words he warned them; and he pleaded with them, "Save yourselves from this corrupt generation."
- 41 Those who accepted his message were baptised, and about three thousand were added to their number that day.

REFLECTION — EMPOWERED BY THE HOLY SPIRIT

"Amazed and perplexed, they asked one another, 'What does this mean?'" (v.12)

Those disciples were utterly transformed by the Pentecost experience,
when they were baptised in the Holy Spirit.

Undoubtedly, without the coming of the Holy Spirit to the disciples there would be no church today.

The disciples were uncertain about what awaited them in Jerusalem (Acts 1:6),
even though Jesus had been clear and specific in what He said.

They were to "wait for the gift my Father promised" (v.4), namely, the Holy Spirit (v.5).

That promise is explicitly stated in the passage we in John 14:15-27.

Although the Spirit is to be sent by the Father (John 14:26),
it is Jesus who is to baptise them in the Spirit (John 1:33).

Being baptised in the Holy Spirit means

being initiated into a new and deeper personal awareness of the Spirit's power.

Although the promise of the Spirit was made originally to the apostles,
Peter explained that it was for all later disciples as well (Acts 2:39).

And even on Pentecost, the Holy Spirit was given to all those present,
i.e. probably the 120 believers present when they chose the apostle to take the place of Judas.

People waste time arguing exactly what they saw,
or whether it was picture language.

That is to miss the point.

... a sound like the blowing of a violent wind ... (Acts 2:2)

... what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them ... (Acts 2:2)

They were attempting to describe the inexplicable.

The reality was that these people had an amazing experience of God,
where His Holy Spirit came to dwell within them &

completely transform them and empower them.

Never before had such a small group of ordinary people turned the world upside down.

God by His Holy Spirit empowered ordinary men and women
to do and say things beyond their natural abilities.

They became supernaturally empowered.

There was no human explanation for what was taking place.

But, this is also the story of every man & woman, or Church that's been used in great ways for God.
They were 'set on fire' for God, &
that experience affected the world around them.

Just like those early apostles who waited in Jerusalem between the Ascension & Pentecost,
many remain ignorant of the Holy Spirit's power in personal experience,
even though the Holy Spirit is referred to constantly in Christian worship.

The Holy Spirit entered our hearts when we became a Christian,
but as we hear about the Holy Spirit,
we may be led into a new depth of awareness of the Spirit's power within &
so be "baptised" in the Holy Spirit,
believing, living, witnessing in the Spirit's power.

I want to try to tell you what life is like when filled with the Holy Spirit.
Remember, *God is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine,
according to his power that is at work within us.* (Ephesians 3:20)

I don't think there is a clearer way to show you what happens when people are baptised with the HS
than by pointing to the amazing change which the experience made in the lives of the disciples.
It is one of the most amazing changes in the whole Bible.

The disciples were under Jesus' teaching and training for 3 years.

They watched his way of life.

They saw his prayer life.

They were present when he healed people.

They listened to his teaching.

They puzzled over his parables.

Yet they remained far short of being the people Jesus would have them be,
But they were completely transformed by the pouring out of the Holy Spirit on them.

The disciples had witnessed and experienced the ministry of Jesus,

His death, resurrection and ascension.

Yet knowledge of the facts, even at first hand,

Wasn't enough to equip and enable them to share the Gospel effectively with other people.

The Holy Spirit transformed them:

from being a withdrawn, prayerful and expectant community in the upper room,

to a public community with a cutting edge of confidence and communication skills.

WHAT WERE THESE CHANGES?

1 THE HOLY SPIRIT BROUGHT A CHANGE IN THEIR RELATIONSHIP WITH JESUS.

During Jesus' life on earth, the disciples could not have Jesus within them.

He was very near them, but outside them.

Their receiving of Jesus' teaching did not come to fruition until they were filled with the Holy Spirit.

The disciples had been called by Jesus.

"Come follow me," Jesus said to Simon Peter and Andrew, James and John.

At once they left their nets and followed him. (Mark 1:17-18)

And when Jesus called Levi (Matthew),

we read that, *Levi got up, left everything and followed him.* (Luke 5:28)

On one occasion, Peter actually said to Jesus,

"We have left everything to follow you." (Matthew 19:27)

They were with Jesus for about 3 years being prepared for baptism in the Holy Spirit.

Forsaking all to follow Jesus was the first step, not the end.

Time after time Jesus taught them humility,

yet there was contention amongst them as to who should be the chief.

Even at the Last Supper we read (Luke 22:24):

Also a dispute arose among them as to which of them was considered to be the greatest.

Christ taught them humility time and again, but they could not understand.

Christ was still outside of them.

He could not have a relationship within the depth of their being while He was still on earth.

This shows us that no outward instruction, even from Christ Himself, or His words of Scripture, can bring us the true and full blessing, till the Holy Spirit works it within us.

The Spirit of Jesus within us. Don't you long for that?

Paul's prayer to the Ephesians (3:16-17):

I pray that out of His glorious riches He may strengthen you with power through His Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith.

Jesus said: *"On that day you will realise that I am in my Father, and you are in Me, and I am in you."* (John 14:20)

2 THE PRESENCE OF JESUS BY THE HOLY SPIRIT IS MEANT TO BE UNBROKEN, CONTINUAL & FOR EVER.

While Jesus was on earth He could not always be with the disciples.

After Pentecost Jesus was always with them, within their hearts.

They were never alone.

And for us as well, the Holy Spirit within our hearts is Jesus always with us.

3 THE HOLY SPIRIT BROUGHT A CHANGE IN THE INNER LIFE OF THE DISCIPLES.

Up to Pentecost they experienced lives of failure and weakness.

We can see how they longed to be faithful to Him,

& yet their pride and their self-confidence was the cause of continual failure.

Think of Peter.

He loved Jesus,

but he lacked courage.

He despaired of himself.

At the Last Supper:

Peter said, *"Lord, I am ready to go with you to prison and to death."*

Jesus answered, *"I tell you, Peter, before the cock crows today, you will deny three times that you know me."* (St. Luke 22:33-34)

Peter had been proud & self-confident, relying on his own resources.

What shame he must have felt after his denial! What utter despair.

But what a change when Pentecost came.
When the Holy Spirit poured into the lives of Peter & the others,
they were filled with the might and the power of the living Jesus, the Saviour from sin.
And that transformation is available to us as well.

4 THE HOLY SPIRIT BROUGHT A CHANGE IN REGARD TO THEIR WORK.

Jerusalem was crowded with people for the Jewish Festival of Pentecost.

At least as many people as at Passover.

Pentecost was one of the 3 festivals every male living within 20 ml legally bound to come.

Passover, Pentecost, & Feast of Tabernacles.

Pentecost means 50th &

another name for Pentecost was "The Feast of Weeks" (7 weeks = a week of weeks)

Grain harvest began at Passover &

completed by Pentecost when the Priest offered 2 loaves in gratitude.

As well as of agricultural significance, it was also of historical significance.

Commemorated, since the late inter-testamental period

the giving of the Law of Moses on Mt Sinai,

∴ This was reckoned to have been 50 days after the Exodus.

It was a holiday for all, so crowds of people on the streets.

∴ At Pentecost Peter had a big crowd listening to him.

And his preaching was transformed by the Holy Spirit.

And 3000 were converted.

The pouring out of the Holy Spirit made that possible.

Jesus was very near to them & he was very loving.

But while on earth He was outside of them & could not get into their hearts to dwell there.

No outward instruction, even from Christ himself,

could bring them the true and full blessing until they were baptised in the Holy Spirit.

Peter and the other disciples after the crucifixion were in lockdown.

Following the resurrection, they really believed in Jesus &

we read that after the Ascension they spent their time together in prayer and praising God,

waiting, as instructed, for the gift of the Holy Spirit,

which Jesus had promised them. (Acts 1:14; St. Luke 24:53)

But it was not until Pentecost

that Jesus dwelt in their hearts & was with them all the time &

they received his power.

The 120, having been together for a week, or longer,

in prayer and Christian fellowship

were filled with the Holy Spirit.

They then began to speak in tongues, praising God in languages they had not learnt.

Subsequently in Acts, we read how people became believers &

then received the Holy Spirit after prayer and usually the laying on of hands by a disciple.

How those disciples were changed by their receiving of the power of the Holy Spirit!

Peter, an ordinary, poorly educated fisherman, preached to the crowds on the day of Pentecost.

...and about 3000 were added to their number that day. Acts 2:41)

The Holy Spirit gave the boldness.

The Holy Spirit gave the wisdom.

The Holy Spirit gave the message.
The Holy Spirit gave the converting power.
The Holy Spirit gave the healing power.

We soon realise how little we can do in our own strength.
If we are to be effective witnesses for Christ, we need the power of his Holy Spirit.

For me things changed dramatically
when the Holy Spirit became a person I encountered
rather than merely a doctrine I believed in.

You only have to ask God to overwhelm you with his Holy Spirit and be open to receive him.
It is my prayer that each of you may have a similar experience, that your lives and the church here in
may be renewed.

SILENT PRAYER

3RD HYMN 395 StF Spirit of the living God. (*Daniel Iverson*)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1TqaZVy8Vx8>

Spirit of the living God,
Fall afresh on me;
Spirit of the living God,
Fall afresh on me.
Break me, melt me, mould me, fill me.
Spirit of the living God,
Fall afresh on me.

INTERCESSIONS

Dear Lord, our heavenly Father,
We thank you for all those who are working on the front line in the service of us all.
Forgive us that in the past we may not have shown them our appreciation,
merely thinking that was the work they had chosen to do.
Now we realise that at this time some have lost their lives in serving others.
We pray for their families.
We pray for those performing very menial tasks that we don't really think about,
although we would miss them if they were not done.
Teach us to be more appreciative of the less glamorous services we receive.
We pray for all our leaders and their advisors.
Fill them with wisdom to make the right decisions on our behalf.
We pray for the scientists as they seek to produce a vaccine for covid-19.

Loving God,
We pray for all those who are struggling at this time:
the sick, the dying, the grieving, the unemployed, the poor, the lonely,
those whose plans have been disrupted,
those who cannot cope for whatever reason.

There are just so many varied difficult situations that people are experiencing.
Keep us alert as to how we could help, perhaps with a phone call at this time.
May we be faithful in our prayers, both at home and together.

We offer all our prayers in the name of Jesus Christ, our risen Saviour and Lord. Amen.

4TH HYMN

407 StF Hear the call of the kingdom. (*Keith & Kristyn Getty & Stuart Townend*)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d5AkyRFIKaM>

or <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WL-UdwB0Qvc> live worship version

Hear the call of the kingdom,
Lift your eyes to the King.
Let His song rise within you
As a fragrant offering
Of how God, rich in mercy,
Came in Christ to redeem
All who trust in His unfailing grace.

Hear the call of the kingdom
To reach out to the lost
With the Father's compassion,
In the wonder of the cross,
Bringing peace and forgiveness
And a hope yet to come;
Let the nations put their trust in Him.

Hear the call of the kingdom
To be children of light,
With the mercy of heaven,
The humility of Christ.
Walking justly before Him,
Loving all that is right,
That the life of Christ may shine through
us.

*King of heaven, we will answer the call;
We will follow, bringing hope to the world,
Filled with passion, filled with power to
proclaim
Salvation in Jesus' name.*

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CLOSING PRAYER

Lord God our Father,
fill each one of us with the Holy Spirit, the power of the living God;
guide us and strengthen us;
transform us and all your faithful people,
that we may live and work to your praise and glory.
Through Jesus Christ our Lord, we pray,
who is alive and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and forever. Amen.