

Sunday 31st May – Pentecost

Please note that you will need a candle and a means of lighting it at the end of the service

Opening hymn- Come down O Love Divine

1 Come down, O Love divine,
Seek thou this soul of mine,
And visit it with thine own ardour glowing;
O Comforter, draw near,
Within my heart appear,
And kindle it, thy holy flame bestowing.

2 O let it freely burn,
Till earthly passions turn
To dust and ashes in its heat consuming;
And let thy glorious light
Shine ever on my sight,
And clothe me round, the while my path illuming.

3 And so the yearning strong,
With which the soul will long,
Shall far outpass the power of human telling;
For none can guess its grace,
Till Love create a place
Wherein the Holy Spirit makes a dwelling.

Easter greeting

Alleluia, Christ is risen!
He is risen indeed, Alleluia!

Collect for Pentecost

Holy Spirit, sent by the Father,
ignite in us your holy fire;
strengthen your children with the gift of faith,
revive your Church with the breath of love,
and renew the face of the earth,
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen

Readings

1 Corinthians 12:4-13

Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the discernment of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. All these are activated by one and the same Spirit, who allots to each one individually just as the Spirit chooses.

For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.

Acts 2:1-21

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.

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.' 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."

Song – Spirit of the Living God

Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on me.
Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on me.
Melt me, mould me, fill me, use me.
Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on me.

Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on us.
Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on us.
Melt us, mould us, fill us, use us.
Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on us.

John 20:19-23

When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, 'Peace be with you.' After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, 'Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.' When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.'

Sermon – Rev Paul Day

I want to think about two journeys through time this morning; both journeys of about two months; both journeys which involved lives being changed and new ways of doing things emerging; both journeys which showed God at work in the most surprising of ways.

The first is the story of those first followers of Jesus that we hear about Sunday by Sunday. I want to pick up the story about 8 weeks ago. They were celebrating and praising God as they followed Jesus into Jerusalem. He was on a donkey, fulfilling an ancient prophecy. They were waving their palm branches and shouting Hosanna! It seemed to them that the world was about to change for the better. That this Jesus they had been following was about to transform not only their lives but also the life of their nation; that God's Kingdom was about to begin.

But then, just a few days later Jesus their inspiration, their mentor, their teacher was arrested, tried and crucified. Their hopes were dashed. Their joy turned to confusion and sorrow. Amongst their small group they witnessed betrayal, denial, flight, fear and hiding.

And then rumours began to circulate that Jesus was alive. Rumours that seemed to be too good to be true. He had risen from the dead. He appeared to them in locked rooms, as they walked and by the lakeside, but he seemed to come and go. He spoke to them and taught them and encouraged them, but it was all so confusing. They were in a limbo state. They knew they couldn't go back, but they couldn't see how to move forwards. They were existing, not living.

And then this Jesus took them to Bethany, told them to wait a little longer for power from on high and said farewell. He told them that this power would be God's Spirit – the life of him, Jesus, living in them.

Which leads us to our reading today when the Holy Spirit came upon them just as Jesus had promised. Suddenly the way ahead seemed clear. Not easy but clear. Not the same but clear. They could begin to see themselves living again – this time with a new purpose to proclaim the story of Jesus to all. Living now with the Spirit of Jesus within them. With his power, with his love, with his words. And as they did so the Christian message was born and began to spread around the world.

That's the first story

The second story also began about eight weeks ago. People like us were busy living our ordinary lives - working, worshipping in our churches, spending time with those we love, planning for the future. And then our country, along with the rest of the world came under threat from the Covid 19 virus. Everything stopped. Many of us were told to stay at home – an initial period of three months was mentioned. The rest of us were to restrict going out to essential trips only. Most shops and just about all public buildings, including church buildings, were to close. We were not even to go out to visit those we love or care for.

These were confusing times. Queues at supermarkets; shortages of essential items, news of friends and family who had contracted the virus. Grief as we heard of people we cared about who had died. Sorrow as we learned of people who couldn't see their partners or parents in care homes. Sadness as we saw funeral services with just a handful of close family attending, unable to give each other a simple hug to show how much they cared. The world around us had changed. How could we cope.

But in these confusing times we slowly learned ways of coping. We set up new routines; friends and neighbours began to help with essential shopping and other jobs; we began to use the internet so that we could have video conversations with those we love; we began to worship in our own homes, virtually connecting with others from our churches over the phone and over the internet. And all the time we looked forward to the day when things would be back to normal. When our old ways of doing things would resume. We were in a limbo state. We knew we couldn't go back, but we couldn't see how to move forwards. We were existing, not living.

And it seems to me that there are many parallels between these two stories of journeys through time

Hopes dashed
Confusion
Sadness
Sorrow
Misunderstanding
uncertainty
Lives on hold

The story of those first Christians didn't end with Pentecost Sunday of course. The Acts of the Apostles tells us how inspired by the Spirit the church grew and spread throughout the world. The first Christians began to see and experience the power of God's Spirit. Paul talks in that reading from the first letter to the Corinthians about the ways that the Holy Spirit equips ordinary people to do extraordinary things. We see the beginnings of how the Christian faith changed history.

And our story of course goes on too. Slowly we are beginning to realise that coming out of lockdown is going to be much harder than entering it. It will involve keeping social distance between people; the need to avoid gathering in large groups; the need for continued handwashing and disinfecting. We are beginning to see that a return to anything that resembled a "normal" way of doing things is going to be a long way off. We are beginning to see that we need to move from existing through the lockdown to actually living in it and through it as it evolves. And as Christians and churchgoers we are beginning to see that our faith journeys can't be on hold forever – we have to begin to live out our church lives in a new way in this different and ever changing world.

Back at the end of March when church buildings were closed and the lockdown began, I was hoping in quiet confidence that the first day when we would be back in our church buildings would be today – Pentecost Sunday. Often known as the birthday of the church. The day when we celebrate the Holy Spirit coming to those first disciples; the day when we remember Peter standing up in front of the crowd and proclaiming the message of Jesus. To me it seemed entirely appropriate that this would be the day when normal church life would begin again. But how wrong I was.

But maybe Pentecost Sunday – today – can still be a turning point for us. Perhaps we would do well to learn from those first Christians though. Learn from them as they took their brave first steps into the new world assured of God's presence with them through his Spirit.

I feel its time for us to take a step forward. We have been doing some great things over these past weeks. The ministry team have come up with some inspirational reflections and sermons; our pastoral support has (I hope and trust) made sure that all we know are well and OK. But all the things we have been doing have been with the backdrop of “this is only for a short time” , “when we get back to church” and “when we get back to normal”.

I have come to the conclusion over the last week or so that we will probably not be able to get back into our buildings to worship in the way we have in the past for many months to come. There is talk of church buildings opening in July, but this will have to be with restricted numbers attending and with very careful and rigorous hygiene. If we can get back into church we will be spread throughout the building; there is doubt as to whether we would be able to sing together; we will not be able to share coffee or enjoy social meals with each other; and what communion might look like I just do not know.

So I believe it's the time for us to move on. To accept that this is the way things will be for a good while yet; that if we can “get back to church” it will be for a limited number of people and the service would be anything but normal. And if this is where we will be for some time, I am sure that we are being called to live and not just exist; to make Christ known as best we can in the situation we are in now.

And that means not being afraid of new ways of doing things. From study groups to prayer groups to social activities. To ask questions about how we can

reconnect with people during these difficult times. I don't have all the answers. I have a few ideas, but I can also see many problems and challenges. And maybe one of the biggest is the questions about internet access. We have used the Zoom conference facility to have PCC meetings and after church coffee, and there are many other things we can do using it. But how to involve those who have no access to the internet? Here we need to listen to each other, to keep an eye open to see what others are doing, and to – most importantly – listen to the prompting of God through his Holy Spirit.

None of this is going to be easy, but then it wasn't easy for those first followers of Jesus as they proclaimed the Christian message. We remember that at Pentecost the Holy Spirit came to Peter and the others and empowered them in their mission. We have the same Spirit present with us – and he will guide us and empower us as we play our part in the Christian story. He will equip us each with gifts and abilities to be used for him. The times may be strange and confusing, but God is the same and through his Spirit he is with us always.

The sign outside St James says that even though the building is closed, the church is alive and active. Let us make sure that is really the case. Let us be an active, vibrant and growing church in these ever changing times we are living through. Let us ask God to fill us with his Spirit in a new and exciting way as we begin to live again, and not simply exist.

Introduction to the Peace

The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace.
If we live in the Spirit, let us walk in the Spirit.

The peace of the Lord be always with you
And also with you

The Commission

Blessed are you, sovereign God, overflowing in love.
With Pentecost dawns the age of the Spirit.
Now the flame of heaven rests on every believer.
Strong and weak, women and men tell out your word;
the young receive visions, the old receive dreams.

With the new wine of the Spirit
they proclaim your reign of love.
Amid the birth pangs of the new creation
the way of light is made known.
Source of freedom, giver of life,
blessed are you, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
All Blessed be God for ever.

At this point please light your candle

For fifty days we have celebrated the victory of our Lord Jesus Christ over the powers of sin and death. We have proclaimed God's mighty acts and we have prayed that the power that was at work when God raised Jesus from the dead might be at work in us.

As part of God's Church here in Shirley, I call upon you to live out what you proclaim.

Empowered by the Holy Spirit, will you dare to walk into God's future, trusting him to be your guide?

All By the Spirit's power, we will.

Will you dare to embrace each other and grow together in love?

All We will.

Will you dare to share your riches in common and minister to each other in need?

All We will.

Will you dare to pray for each other until your hearts beat with the longings of God?

All We will.

Will you dare to carry the light of Christ into the world's dark places?

All We will.

The Easter Candle is extinguished in silence.

The Lord is here.

All His Spirit is with us.

Today we have remembered the coming of God's power on the disciples and we invite that same Spirit to drive us out into the wild places of the world.

May the Spirit,
who hovered over the waters when the world was created,
breathe into you the life he gives.

All Amen.

May the Spirit,
who overshadowed the Virgin when the eternal Son came among us,
make you joyful in the service of the Lord.

All Amen.

May the Spirit,
who set the Church on fire upon the Day of Pentecost,
bring the world alive with the love of the risen Christ.

All Amen.

And the blessing of God almighty,
the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit,
be among you and remain with you always.

All Amen.

Filled with the Spirit's power,
go in the light and peace of Christ. Alleluia, alleluia.

All Thanks be to God. Alleluia, alleluia.

Final hymn – Shine Jesus Shine

Lord, the light of your love is shining
In the midst of the darkness, shining
Jesus, Light of the world, shine upon us
Set us free by the truth you now bring us
Shine on me, shine on me

Shine, Jesus, shine
Fill this land with the Father's glory
Blaze, Spirit, blaze
Set our hearts on fire
Flow, river, flow
Flood the nations with grace and mercy
Send forth your word
Lord, and let there be light

Lord, I come to your awesome presence
From the shadows into your radiance
By the blood I may enter your brightness
Search me, try me, consume all my darkness
Shine on me, shine on me

Shine, Jesus, shine ..

As we gaze on your kingly brightness
So our faces display your likeness
Ever changing from glory to glory
Mirrored here may our lives tell your story
Shine on me, shine on me

Shine, Jesus, shine