

Service for Sunday 31st May, Pentecost Revd Pauline Crispin

Loving God, whether you come to us in the unexpected or the familiar, we are glad of your presence. We want to live well in the life you have given to us.

We long to experience the fullness of your love.

Whether you come to us with a challenge to take risks or the offer of comfort, we welcome you into our lives. We want to understand more about you.

We long to experience the fullness of your grace.

Whether you come to us like a rushing wind or on a quiet breath, we reach out to you. We want to enjoy the gift of your Spirit.

We long to experience the fullness of your power. Amen.

Sing or read:

- 1 Breathe on me, Breath of God;
fill me with life anew,
that I may love what thou dost love,
and do what thou wouldst do.
- 2 Breathe on me, Breath of God,
until my heart is pure,
until with thee I will one will,
to do and to endure.
- 3 Breathe on me, Breath of God,
till I am wholly thine,
until this earthly part of me
glows with thy fire divine.
- 4 Breathe on me, Breath of God;
so shall I never die,
but live with thee the perfect life
of thine eternity.

Edwin Hatch (1835–1889)

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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.'

Reflection on the Word:

This Sunday is Pentecost, often called the birthday of the church. Our scripture, hymns and our prayers today reflect and celebrate the gift of the Holy Spirit. But what does all this mean? The vibrant scene told in Acts gives us a mental image of a violent, rushing wind. We also visualise flames over the heads of the disciples, and scripture tells us that they saw what seemed to be individual flames of fire alighting on each one of them.

We also hear of everyone speaking at once, different languages. What does all this mean? Well of course we now know it is the Holy Spirit at work here. In the first chapter of Acts, Jesus instructed his disciples to stay in Jerusalem, not to go anywhere else just yet, because they needed to wait for something that God, through Jesus, had promised. The gospel lesson for today, (found in John 14), which I have not included in this service, but you can read at home this week, tells us that Jesus, as they shared their last meal together in the upper room, described the coming of the Holy Spirit. He told them that firstly, he was going to be leaving them. However, an Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom God would send, would teach them everything and remind them of what Jesus had told them in person.

So, the disciples should have been prepared for something; they knew Jesus had promised a gift from God, but what did that mean? I do not know about you, but I wonder whether the disciples really understood. We cannot really blame those disciples if they were surprised when the Holy Spirit came upon them in such a dramatic way. They would probably not have understood even if Jesus had given them more details.

We still do not have the answer to our question "What does this mean?" Therefore, let us take a closer look into the Pentecost passage. We know that the Holy Spirit was promised by God and is given by God. We know that on the day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit did not come quietly or discreetly. The Holy Spirit came with purpose. Sometimes I think we get so hung up on the speaking-in-tongues part of this story that we lose sight of the bigger, more significant picture. There is, of course, something 'more' going on here. It seems a sure thing that folks outside the group of believers did not understand what was going on, because their reaction was to assume that all these disciples were drunk. They did not understand, they had not been a part of the group of Jesus' followers, so they immediately concluded that what they were observing was meaningless and foolish.

Even so, the devout believers were also puzzled. They were the ones asking "what does this mean?"

Peter addresses the crowd and he preaches an eloquent and powerful sermon. He begins by reassuring the assembled people that what they are witnessing is due to the Holy Spirit. It is fulfilling what the prophet Joel spoke about years before.

Today's text ends there but Peter's sermon continues a lot longer. Even so, there is plenty for us to consider in this first section. One of the things that seems especially significant to me is that God's promise of the Holy Spirit is all-inclusive. It is clear from Jesus' words that the gift is meant for everyone not just a privileged few or a specific group.

Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. Everyone who allows the Holy Spirit to work in her or him will be capable of doing great things for God.

This means that even as we accept and celebrate the coming of the Holy Spirit as a church, we should also accept and celebrate individually.

Pentecost means an empowerment, an engagement with and commitment to doing the Lord's work. The dramatic manifestation of the Holy Spirit as related in Acts chapter two simply illustrates, again, that salvation through Christ is for everyone.

What does this mean? That is the question we have been pondering this morning. It means that the Holy Spirit is a gift from God. It means that it is empowering and energizing. When the Holy Spirit rushes in there are no limits! It means that The Methodist Church celebrates today, along with the church in the world, the day God blessed us with a gift that compels us to share! So, let us understand the good news of God's love, because we are also filled, with the Holy Spirit! Let us pray that that there will be no confusion or misunderstanding, but that our words and actions will clearly speak of God's love for all. "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved." How fantastic is that!

Meditation:

Think back to the account of that first Pentecost. Imagine yourself in the room with the disciples. How does it feel the experience the sound of the violent wind and what appears to be tongues fire? Try to imagine the fire resting on you too. Filling you, to overflowing with the Holy Spirit. The disciples spill out of the building and onto the streets of the city. You follow them. You hear the different languages and witness the crowd understanding the good news.

Suddenly you are aware of a person standing in the crowd next to you. It is the risen Christ. In his hands, which still carry the marks of the nails, He is holding a package, a gift and he says to you, 'this is for you.' You take it and unwrap it. Take a moment. As you look at it, do you see and understand what the gift is and how to use it? Or maybe you cannot make out what the gift is. In which case over the days ahead continue to visit this scene until you realise what the gift is. You can be sure that you have one, because we are told that no one is left out. Take your time, there is no rush!

Sing or read:

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.

Daniel Iverson (1890–1977)

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Lord God, Peter was an ordinary fisherman, but you changed his life.

Show me how to change.

Fill me with your Spirit. Change my life.

Peter was able to speak out for you.

Show me how to speak out.

Fill me with your Spirit. Change my life.

People understood what Peter said.

Show me how to make things clear.

Fill me with your Spirit. Change my life.

Peter spoke to all people.

Show me how to speak to all.

Fill me with your Spirit. Change my life.

Peter was fearless, Peter was strong.

Show me how to be brave for you.

Fill me with your Spirit. Change my life. Amen.

Our Father in heaven,

hallowed be your name,

your kingdom come, your will be done,

on earth as in heaven.

Give us today our daily bread.

Forgive us our sins

as we forgive those who sin against us.

Lead us not into temptation

but deliver us from evil.

For the kingdom, the power,

and the glory are yours now and for ever. Amen.

May the power of the Spirit challenge me.

May the peace of the Spirit comfort me.

May the presence of the Spirit enable me to live in love and service in the name of Christ.

Amen.

