

Pentecost 2021

Collect: 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.

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.”

Gospel: John 15.26–27, 16.4b–15: Jesus spoke to his disciples: ‘When the Advocate comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who comes from the Father, he will testify on my behalf. You also are to testify because you have been with me from the beginning. I have said these things to you so that when their hour comes you may remember that I told you about them. ‘I did not say these things to you from the beginning, because I was with you. But now I am going to him who sent me; yet none of you asks me, “Where are you going?” But because I have said these things to you sorrow has filled your hearts. I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Advocate will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you. And when he comes, he will prove the world wrong about sin and righteousness and judgement: about sin, because they do not believe in me; about righteousness, because I am going to the Father and you will see me no longer; about judgement, because the ruler of this world has been condemned. “I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own, but will speak whatever he hears, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me because he will take what is mine and declare it to you. All that the Father has is mine. For this reason, I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you.

Reflection:

As motorists or cyclists, we complain about potholes. An empty space that needs filling in. Pentecost celebrates when the empty space inside the followers of Jesus was filled in with the spirit of God.

And more. The road for them was made good, made clear and straight as John the Baptist had spoken of, and it made possible a straight and level path for all.

No longer people focusing on division and difference but seeking each other's welfare and bearing each other's burdens. Being open to sharing all that they had with each other and recognising the spirit of God was present in each of their neighbours whose openness to God could be nurtured and grown just as their faith that was being nurtured and grown.

For Christians, this recognition is marked through baptism and what our own baptism, for many also followed by confirmation, now means. At his baptism Jesus was affirmed to be the Son of God and his life, teaching, the sharing of himself fully with others and the laying down of his life opened out to us what his sonship of God, meant.

For him there were no insiders and outsiders, just what might be called unexpected insiders who found themselves loved and accepted within the love of God. Unexpected insiders who might lose their way but not be lost to God: who might struggle with life but find God's love within bringing hope, bringing new life and bringing joy.

At Pentecost, the followers of Jesus were given a new sense and understanding, a new vision, of what we call the spirit of God. As they looked around at the uniqueness of the living world, looked up at the sun, moon and stars and looked beyond in the contemplation of the mystery of life, they captured a different perception of what it might mean to believe that God accompanied them in everything they did, in their sense of who they were and in the quality of their relationships with each other.

The spirit of God that would shape their lives and their values, living in the way that Jesus had showed them. With the sort of compassion and care found in the story he told of the Good Samaritan, with the selfless love of the shepherd searching for the lost sheep. In all of this the teaching of Jesus to love one another as God loves each and every person. A love that can abide within to give strength and courage in the difficult times and to bring hope and transformation in and for the good.

The poet John Clare captured how the natural world can also be a reference point in our finding that God is with us in all things. He wrote "All nature has a feeling" and that this is communicated in the woods, the fields and the brooks." And in his "Home Pictures in May" he wrote both of the warm daffodils about the garden beds; peeping through their pale slim leaves, their golden heads, sweet earthly suns of spring."

Loving God, open us to the powerful winds of your spirit, open our eyes to the wonders of creation, open our nostrils to the smell of life, open our ears to the words of justice and truth, open our mouths to the taste of freedom and love, open our arms to the touch of our brothers and sisters. Amen.