

Worship for Pentecost Sunday (complete text. A video version is also online)
Keep safe. Keep caring. Keep praying.

Welcome to worship on Pentecost Sunday.
Thank you to all who have contributed to this service; to Iain Ballard for his message, to Audrey Simpson and Michael Sharman for the readings.
Thank you too to the technical team who put it all together. I am Margaret Weir and I am worship leader for today.

THE PREPARATION

Call to worship

Spirit of God, come as flame, and fill our hearts with the fire of your love.

Come, Holy Spirit, come.

Spirit of God, come as wind, and refresh our senses with the breath of new life.

Come, Holy Spirit, come.

Spirit of God, come in words of power, and enlighten our minds with the knowledge of your truth.

Come, Holy Spirit, come

Hymn: StF 372 – 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
illuminating.**

- 3. Let holy charity
mine outward vesture be,
and lowliness become mine inner clothing;
true lowliness of heart,
which takes the humbler part,
and o'er its own shortcomings weeps with
loathing.**
- 4. 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 he become the place
wherein the Holy Spirit makes his dwelling.**

Bianco da Siena (*d.* 1434)

translated by Richard Frederick Littledale (1833–1890)

Prayer of adoration

We adore you, Lord Christ, and we bless you,
for you did not leave your disciples to manage on
their own,
worried and confused,
but sent your Holy Spirit to breathe life
and confidence and authority into their hearts.
Come to our world today,
transform it afresh, and fill our hearts
with the power of your redeeming love.
Amen.

Prayer of confession

Forgive us, Lord, when we are afraid of diversity;
when we stifle creativity;
when we impose uniformity;
when we suppress energy and joy.
Forgive us, and bring us, like those first disciples,
from a place of hesitance to a place of hope;

from disappointment to delight;
from caution to celebration.
Amen.

Declaration of forgiveness

And on this Pentecost Sunday, we hear you saying to us, "your sins are forgiven."
And for that we rejoice
Amen.

The Lord's Prayer

We say the Lord's prayer:

**Our Father who 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 trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation;
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom, the power and the
glory,
for ever and ever.
Amen.**

Hymn StF 394 – Spirit of God, unseen as the wind

***Spirit of God, unseen as the wind,
gentle as is the dove,
teach us the truth and help us believe,
show us the Saviour's love.***

**1. You spoke to us long, long ago,
gave us the written word;
we read it still, needing its truth,
through it God's voice is heard.**

***Spirit of God, unseen as the wind,
gentle as is the dove,
teach us the truth and help us believe,
show us the Saviour's love.***

**2. Without your help we fail our Lord,
we cannot live his way;
we need your power, we need your
strength,
following Christ each day.**

***Spirit of God, unseen as the wind,
gentle as is the dove,
teach us the truth and help us believe,
show us the Saviour's love.***

Margaret V. Old (1932–2001)

THE MINISTRY OF THE WORD

1st Reading Ezekiel 37 1-14

O God I don't know

The hand of God came upon me and led me out. God's spirit set me down in the middle of a valley. It was full of churches. God led me all around them. There were very many lying in the valley and they were dry. God spoke to me saying, "mortal can these churches live?" I answered, "O God, I don't know!" Then God said to me, "prophecy to these churches and say to them, O dry churches hear the word of God. Thus says God to these churches I will cause my spirit to enter to you and you shall live. I will give you a purpose and teach you to love. I will heal you and put my spirit within you and you shall live and you shall know that I am God!"

So I prophesied as I had been commanded and suddenly there was a noise. A rattling of keys and stone and windows, a clunking of pews and chairs a breaking of glass. The churches came together. They found a purpose, but there was no life in them. God said to me, "Call to the Spirit. Call mortal and say to the Spirit, 'Thus says God, come from the four winds, from the ends of the earth breathe upon these dead churches that they may live.'"

I prophesied as God had commanded me. The Spirit came into them and they lived. They stood on their feet a vast multitude. The God said to me, “mortal, these churches are the body of Christ. They say our churches are dried up and our hope is lost and we’re cut off and declining therefore prophecy and say to them, ‘thus says God, I am going to open your doors and bring you out from your buildings and you are going to live. O my people I will bring you back to life, you will know that I am God! I will open your doors and bring you out from your buildings. O my people I will put my Spirit within you and you shall live and I will bring you to a fertile place. Then you will know that I your God have spoken and will act.

Written by Michaela Youngson Past President of the Methodist Church

2nd Reading Acts 2:1-21 (NRSVA)

The Coming of the Holy Spirit

¹When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. ²And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. ³Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. ⁴All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.

⁵Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. ⁶And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each. ⁷Amazed and astonished, they asked, ‘Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? ⁸And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language? ⁹Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus

and Asia, ¹⁰Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, ¹¹Cretans and Arabs—in our own languages we hear them speaking about God’s deeds of power.’ ¹²All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, ‘What does this mean?’ ¹³But others sneered and said, ‘They are filled with new wine.’

Peter Addresses the Crowd

¹⁴But 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. ¹⁵Indeed, these are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only nine o’clock in the morning. ¹⁶No, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel:

¹⁷“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.

¹⁸Even upon my slaves, both men and women, in those days I will pour out my Spirit; and they shall prophesy.

¹⁹And I will show portents in the heaven above and signs on the earth below, blood, and fire, and smoky mist.

²⁰The sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood, before the coming of the Lord’s great and glorious day.

²¹Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.”

Sermon

Over the last 12 months I've heard people refer to the Covid crisis and the pandemic as being like a roller coaster with periods of highs and lows of twists and turns, of not always knowing how

we're feeling and even when we feel we're on solid ground that ground suddenly changes, the mood shifts we learn something new. And so a few days ago in a meeting, I smiled as somebody described the time we're in at the moment as feeling like the end of a roller coaster ride - that flat straight piece of track that you know the ride is over, but it hasn't quite stopped. The excitement and the dread, the stomach churning and all that goes with being on this roller coaster is now over but we're just not quite there yet. And even when we get there and the ride finally does stop, some people will be rushing to get off quickly and others will be taking their time, slightly more cautious, getting their legs back, feeling back on earth rather than up in the air.

I wonder if this time of reducing down to step three might feel the same for you. Are you somebody for whom the end can't come quick enough and off we bound and off we go into a new and different world? or are you finding your feet, trying to get everything ready and stable before taking those first few steps?

Of course as Covid times appear to be coming to an end, we get back to our churches – some of which are open; some are tentatively open; some are planning; and yet others haven't even got there yet. But even those that are open, are finding the church is different to how it was before. We can't yet sing, we can't yet shake hands with each other; we can't yet have tea and coffee after worship and do the things that we would normally do. But even when we do get back to some of those things we hold dear, we get back to a place that is not the same as we left, but in some ways very similar.

The reading from Ezekiel, which is being adapted by Michaela Youngson the ex-president of conference, speaks of a church in decline, and for many of our churches the pre-pandemic time

was one of decline. Of reducing numbers; of people feeling tired and unable to continue; of questions about what the future of church looks like.

The pandemic has done nothing to help those questions – in some ways it has hastened decline, in other ways it has shown us just how tiring it can be for that small number of people who appear to have been running many of our churches. It is a time of noticing that decline did not stop during the pandemic – if anything it accelerated.

It can be a very scary time as we go back into our churches trying to discern what God is calling us to be and do in the future. What will church look like in a year's time? How much will be physically gathered, and how much will be online? How comfortable will we be in each other's presence? And yet how much are we missing each other at the moment? Will people come back and take up some of those jobs that are important in organizing our church communities, so that we can continue our activities – of worship, of mission, of outreach and evangelism, of being *in* the communities that we serve?

And yet today is Pentecost, a time of change. That first Pentecost was the beginning, the very birth of the Church; when that group of disciples went from fear and anxiety of Jesus's death and resurrection, his ascension, what is going to happen next – and they received the promised Holy Spirit, given to them by Christ to bring them even closer to God.

In some ways to me it feels like we're in a very similar position today. What is the future? What will it look like? Will it be a future in which we thrive? or a future in which our decline continues or accelerates? Perhaps into that, the message

of the giving of the Holy Spirit can be very powerful for us, because that early church does not decline it grows.

Many times in the book of Acts we hear those words

'and thousands were added to their number'.

Oh Lord if only thousands were added to our number this Pentecost Sunday! Yet Pentecost is a time to remind us that God is present with us. It is part of our spirituality, our doctrine as Methodists, that we believe that the Holy Spirit is present within each and every human being – whether we know it or not; whether we feel it or not; whether we encourage it or not, the Spirit is present and at work within each and every one of us calling us into a deeper and fuller relationship with God; encouraging us to read the scriptures to pray together, to confer together and discuss what faith means to each other and to the whole people of God.

It is a time to be excited as the disciples of Christ in the 21st century, that we could be at the beginning of something new and different, that speaks to the current age and is a growing family of disciples that is Church, that is our Circuit, that is the Methodist Church, that is the worldwide, universal Church of God. What an exciting future this could be.

Yet I know that often when I'm excited, I also have a tinge of anxiety. Will this go right? Will I be able to play my part? Who will join me? Will I be alone? What is this going to look like?

Those are the times when if we feel we can step out in faith, even though that draws our anxiety and our concern, – in our stepping out we find that the Spirit of God is with us, is holding us up, is encouraging us on, to build the kingdom that God has already started, is continuing to build and will build until the very end of time.

in Michaela's adaptation of Ezekiel 37, we have that image of dried up churches stuck in their buildings desperate to get out and to be alive.

Pentecost and the gift of the Spirit is about God offering to us life in all its fullness. Life connected to God, walking with God every step of the way. But Pentecost as the beginning of the Church is not about us merely as individuals finding our spirituality, finding our faith, finding our relationship with God. It is about us the whole body – the Church, the people of God, - stepping out together, being alive and sharing that life with those around us.

In that reading we have the line

'Oh my people

I will put my Spirit within you

and you shall live

and I will bring you

to a fertile place'.

In all of the fear of church decline, in all of the concern of who is going to come and pick up roles and how to organize, we have this promise of God, that in the Spirit we can be drawn to a fertile place.

It is my own hope that the time of Covid has taught us new ways of being; new ways of doing church; new ways of experiencing church, that might revitalize us and might give us the energy to put down the things that were holding us back and pick up the things that will take us forward to being Church into the middle part of the 21st century.

As a study of the history of the church, I'm encouraged that previous revivals have almost always begun after a national or an international catastrophe. We have one just before the evangelical revival and John Wesley and it's important that we note that today is Pentecost but also Aldersgate – the Sunday closest to the

24th of May when Wesley felt his heart strangely warmed; when he went from somebody who was scared and uncertain, unsure, felt that he was on poor ground – was even prepared to give a preaching because he didn't feel in the faith; found his heart strangely warmed; felt that God had said 'yes even you John, even you are somebody I will use to build my kingdom'. And we have a movement that now has many thousands of people in Britain and millions across the world; a Church that is part of the universal Church; a Church that actually in its entirety is continuing to grow and spread the message of the love of God in the world around us.

We are called as Wesley was in that revival that followed a catastrophe of a civil war and one of the deepest depressions in history. We are called just like the most recent revival in Britain, the Hebridean, which was straight after the second world war. We are called to hold fast to the faith even in these difficult and uncertain times, when it could feel like church itself is about to end, when we're uncertain what things look like we are called to put our trust and faith in the Holy Spirit of God, which is present with each of us, which draws each of us closer to God, which delights when we step out in faith and build new beings, new communities, new places of worship.

And so I encourage you this Pentecost in the anxiety of the ends of Covid, in the difficulties of being Church in the 21st century when we have faced many years of decline and we are tired, let me encourage you that the Spirit is not finished. That the spirit is still active in the world. That the spirit who first called those disciples and changed them from a small band into an entire Church adding thousands their numbers day by day, let me encourage you as Wesley was

encouraged by his heart being strangely warmed, that God is not finished with his church. That we have much to be thankful for and a future that we can look forward to, a future in which growth is a possibility, in which walking closer to God can be a certainty.

Let me encourage you that God is present with us and longs only for the very best for us. This Pentecost, may your lives be touched again by the gift of the Spirit. May you feel the power of God surging inside you, drawing you out from these buildings – our homes, our churches, and into a world where we can be the Church of God in this age.

It is a little over a hundred years ago that the Salvation Army started to sing a hymn 'Oh God of burning cleansing flame, send the fire send the fire'

Hymn: Send the Fire

**O God of burning cleansing flame
Send the fire
Your blood-bought gift today we claim
Send the fire today**

**Look down and see this waiting host
And send the promised Holy Ghost
We need another Pentecost
Send the fire today
Send the fire today**

**God of Elijah hear our cry
Send the fire
And make us fit to live or die
Send the fire today**

**To burn up every trace of sin
To bring the light and glory in
The revolution now begin
Send the fire today
Send the fire today**

**It's fire we want for fire we plead
Send the fire
The fire will meet our every need
Send the fire today**

**For strength to always do what's right
For grace to conquer in the fight
For power to walk the world in white
Send the fire today
Send the fire today**

**To make our weak hearts strong and brave
Send the fire
To live a dying world to save
Send the fire today**

**Oh see us on Your altar lay
We give our lives to You today
So crown the offering now we pray
Send the fire today
Send the fire today
Send the fire today**

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THE RESPONSE

Prayers of intercession

God of power and might, you sent your Spirit to the apostles at Pentecost so that they could tell the world of your wonderful works. Fill your Church with the same courage and confidence, and empower it to proclaim your deeds to all people in words they can understand. As you gave the apostles strength to withstand opposition and imprisonment, give courage and hope to all Christians facing discrimination, danger or persecution for the gospel's sake. Lord, hear us.
Lord, graciously hear us.

God of wisdom, your Son promised his disciples the Spirit of truth.

Give insight and understanding to the leaders of the nations, so that peace may prevail where now there is war or civil conflict.

Give discernment to all entrusted with shaping social and economic policies that affect the lives of others, so that justice may reign where now there is inequality and wrong.

Grant integrity to those responsible for disseminating news and information around the world, and to those who have the power to influence others through advertising and the media.

Lord, hear us.

Lord, graciously hear us.

God of compassion and love, through your Holy Spirit you gave the apostles power to heal sickness and forgive sin.

Bless and uphold those we know who are sick, and those who care for them at home or in hospital.

Lord, hear us.

Lord, graciously hear us.

God of life, you gave the apostles the conviction to proclaim the miracle of your Son's resurrection.

Hold in your safe keeping all who have died, and bring them to be with him in the joy of your presence.

Lord, hear us.

Lord, graciously hear us.

Amen.

The Offering & prayer

You have blessed us with so much, O Lord.

And today we remember that all we have is a gift from you.

May we use these gifts for your work, here on earth.

THE DISMISSAL

Hymn StF 398 – There's a Spirit in the air

1. There's a spirit in the air,
telling Christians everywhere:
'Praise the love that Christ revealed,
living, working in our world!'
2. Lose your shyness, find your tongue,
tell the world what God has done:
God in Christ has come to stay.
Live tomorrow's life today!
3. When believers break the bread,
when a hungry child is fed,
praise the love that Christ revealed,
living, working, in our world.
4. Still the Spirit gives us light,
seeing wrong and setting right:
God in Christ has come to stay.
Live tomorrow's life today!
5. When a stranger's not alone,
where the homeless find a home,
praise the love that Christ revealed,
living, working, in our world.
6. May the Spirit fill our praise,
guide our thoughts and change our ways.
God in Christ has come to stay.
Live tomorrow's life today.
7. There's a Spirit in the air,
calling people everywhere:
praise the love that Christ revealed,
living, working, in our world.

Brian Wren (*b.* 1936)

Prayer & blessing

Breathe on me, breath of God,
fill me with life anew,
that I may love what thou dost love
and do what thou would'st do.

And may the blessing of God; Father, Son and
Holy Spirit be with us now and for evermore.

Amen.

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Hymn StF 398 – There's a Spirit in the air

Brian Wren (*b.* 1936)

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Hymn: Send the Fire

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StF 372 – Come down O Love divine

Bianco da Siena (*d.* 1434)

translated by Richard Frederick Littledale (1833–1890)

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StF 394 – Spirit of God, unseen as the wind

Margaret V. Old (1932–2001)

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NRSV & NRSVA

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