

Pentecost
Sunday, 31st May 2020



Spirit Dancers – Day of Pentecost

Dear Friends in Christ,

'I will pour out my Spirit on all people.' (Joel 2: 28)

So we come to yet another glorious high point in the worship and witness of our Christian faith as we celebrate the Day of Pentecost, when the coming of the Holy Spirit shot the equivalent of a billion volts of electricity into the hearts and minds of the Apostles and compelled them to go out and witness to the Good News of Jesus Christ amongst all who would hear.

In my view, Pentecost shouldn't be restricted to one Sunday in our Lectionary calendar! It is a pivotal moment in the birthing of the Christian movement, in and through which we should allow ourselves to be caught up and transformed – just as it was for the Apostles on that very first day of the corporate body of Christ, of which we remain a vital part. Please go to The Downs Benefice website to see the many links to live-streamed and recorded services for Pentecost. We also have links to *Thy Kingdom Come* prayer resources - including a **virtual 24 hours of prayer** called **'The Upper Room'** from 9am on Saturday, 30th May to 9am on Sunday, 31st May.

A great blessing of my incumbency here in The Downs Benefice of five vibrant parishes is the remarkable Lay Team who assist my ministry in bringing the word of God to you through worship, prayer, reflection and pastoral care. As we arrive at this joyful time of Pentecost, it feels right that you should hear other voices than mine breaking open the Gospels. So, today, I welcome Charlotte Nash, a gifted Licensed Lay Minister in our Benefice, to bless you with the words the Holy Spirit has placed upon her heart to share this Pentecost.

Yours, in the power of the Spirit,

Jax

Rev'd Jax Machin, Rector, The Downs Benefice



Rebecca Brogan/John the Baptist artwork

'When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.' (Acts 2: 1-4)

This Sunday, fifty days after Easter, marks the joyful festival of Pentecost, the birthday of the Church. What a celebration that should be! Yet this year there is a poignancy as we celebrate Pentecost in our homes and as we are reminded of the first Pentecost when the disciples and Mary were gathered in a home in Jerusalem. Ten days previously they had witnessed the Ascension of Jesus into heaven and now they were waiting, as he had instructed them, for the coming of the Holy Spirit.

Yet, was the coming of the Holy Spirit what they expected? I very much doubt it. Certainly the disciples couldn't have missed it, for as they waited, the Spirit came with a sound like the blowing of a violent wind from heaven and filled the whole house. What looked like tongues of fire came to rest on each of them. They found they were able to speak in other languages and proclaim the gospel so that people from other regions who were in Jerusalem at that time could understand them in their native language, and on that day about 3,000 people were converted and baptised. Hence Pentecost is known as the Birthday of the Church.

The coming of the Holy Spirit was dramatic and it must have taken the disciples by surprise. It needed to be dramatic, God was doing something new, something that had never been done before. The coming of the Spirit in this way was a one-off event, to empower God's people as God set about building his church on the lives of ordinary men and women. This is the Spirit prophesied about in the Old Testament and it is the Holy Spirit Jesus promised to his disciples. That first Pentecost was the fulfilment of these prophesies.



'Pentecost Ceiling' – Basilica of San Marco, Milan

As we read through the Acts of the Apostles we learn how the Spirit empowered the disciples. Peter, who only a few weeks previously had denied three times he knew Jesus, was filled with boldness to stand up in front of great crowds and proclaim the Lordship of Jesus. He healed a crippled beggar and when he was put in jail he never wavered in his faith. The book of Acts goes on to tell us about the conversion of St Paul and how under the power and guidance of God's Holy Spirit he took the gospel to the Gentile world. The Holy Spirit came in power to equip God's people to spread the good news of Jesus.

This Pentecost Sunday, in our homes, I wonder what we think about the Holy Spirit, this unseen presence of God?

Recently during a spell of very hot weather, I went for a walk in the cool early morning. I was struck by the fresh scents of the grass and blossom. The air was fresh and sweet smelling, but so often we take our breathing for granted. Covid-19 compromises people's breathing and attacks their lungs making it hard and sometimes impossible to breathe. Breath is a basic human need.

In the Bible, breath is a powerful metaphor for life. At the beginning of Creation God breathed the breath of life into Adam and he became a living being. In John's gospel, after the resurrection, the disciples were in their own Lockdown, hiding for fear of the Jews. Jesus appeared to them, walls were no barrier to Him, and He breathed on them and said: 'Receive the Holy Spirit'. God breathed the breath of life into Adam and He breathed his Holy Spirit on His disciples. As I was enjoying the early morning walk, the fresh air I was breathing was unpolluted, sweet smelling and pure, a reminder that the Spirit God breathes into our lives is pure and good, wholesome and life-giving.



'Pentecost' by Daniel Rice

St Paul writing to the Galatians explains how God's Spirit dwelling in us produces fruit in our lives, all the goodness we see in Jesus' love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness and self-control. God generously gives us his Holy Spirit so that we may become more like Him and others may see Christ in us. His Spirit gives us peace even in the most difficult of circumstances, the peace that surpasses all understanding.

Many people are in Lockdown or self-isolating. In the silence they are asking questions, many people are praying who haven't prayed before. As we pray for the Church around the world, let us pray for God's Spirit to be outpoured upon us afresh and for revival. Let us pray to God to raise up men and women who will see visions, dream dreams and prophesy as God pours out his Spirit on all people. Let us pray for young people to be Spirit filled and hear the call of God upon them to lead His Church in the future.

At the beginning of this year my husband and I visited the church our son attends and we sang a song which speaks prophetically into the world in which we find ourselves living now:

*'Way-maker, Miracle Worker,
Promise Keeper, Light in the Darkness,
My God, that is who You are.'*

The world is praying and searching for a Way through this pandemic; we are praying for Miracles; we are reminding ourselves constantly that God keeps his Promises; and we are praying that in the darkness Jesus is the Light.

God's church lives on through His Holy Spirit who is alive and at work in our lives. Let us rejoice that God calls us by His Spirit to be His people for such a time as this. This weekend take the opportunity to go outside early, or throw open a window, and breathe in the fresh scent of the early morning air. Then let us invite God to breathe His Holy Spirit afresh into our lives and into His Church, and may we be people who are expectant!

*Spirit of God as strong as the wind
Gentle as is the dove:
Teach us the truth and help us believe,
Show us the Saviour's love.*



'Pentecost Sunday around the world 2020' by Office Holidays

*In the last days, God says, 'I will pour out my Spirit on all people.
Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old
men will dream dreams. Even on my servants, both men and women,
I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy.
(Acts 2:17 & 18)*

May God bless you through his Holy Spirit this Pentecost,

Charlotte

Charlotte Nash, LLM, The Downs Benefice

Collect Prayer 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.

Acts 2: 1-21 - The Holy Spirit Comes at Pentecost

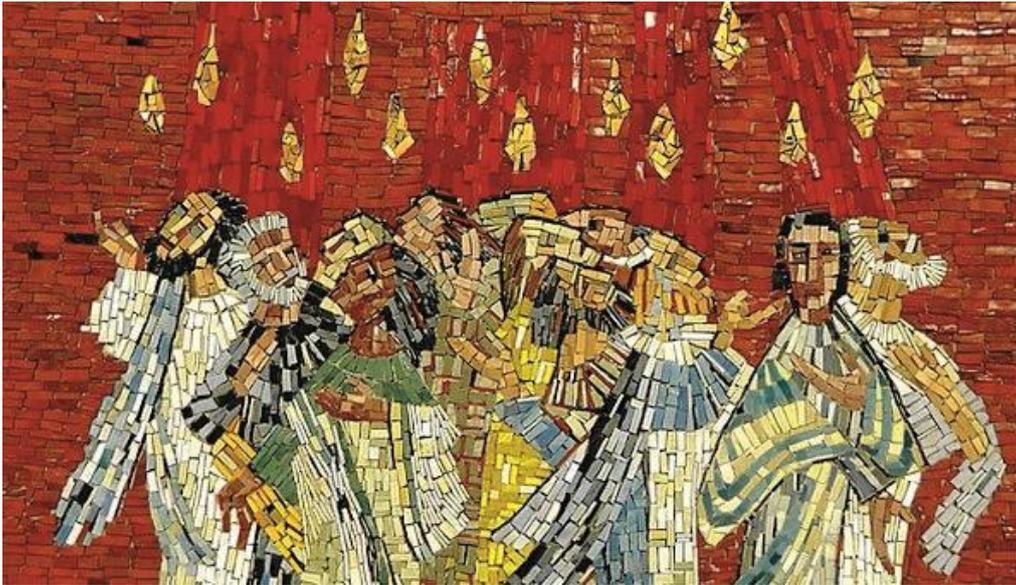
When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.

Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven. When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard their own language being spoken. Utterly amazed, they asked: 'Aren't all these who are speaking Galileans? Then how is it that each of us hears them in our native language? 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 (both Jews and converts to Judaism); Cretans and Arabs - we hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!' Amazed and perplexed, they asked one another: 'What does this mean?' Some, however, made fun of them and said: 'They have had too much wine.'

Peter Addresses the Crowd

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. These people are not drunk, as you suppose. It's only nine in the morning! No, this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel:

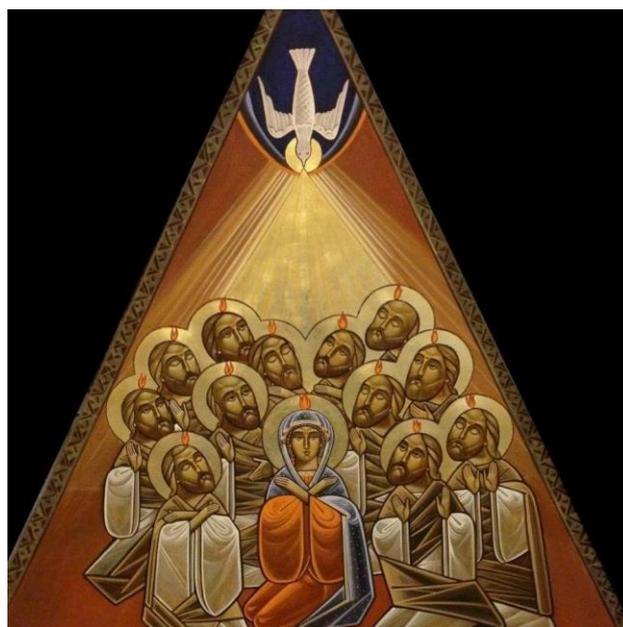
In the last days, God says: 'I will pour out my Spirit on all people.
Your sons and daughters will prophesy,
your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams.
Even on my servants, both men and women,
I will pour out my Spirit in those days and they will prophesy.
I will show wonders in the heavens above and signs on the earth below,
blood and fire and billows of smoke.
The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood
before the coming of the great and glorious day of the Lord.
And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.'



***'Pentecost' from the Church of St Saviour,
Armenian Patriarchate of Jerusalem (Pixabay)***

John 20: 19-23 - Jesus Appears to His Disciples

On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jewish leaders, Jesus came and stood among them and said: 'Peace be with you!' After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord. Again Jesus said: 'Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.' And with that he breathed on them and said, 'Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone's sins, their sins are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.'



Modern Coptic Icon by Stephane Rene