

Pentecost: Sunday 31st May 2020



Jesus Mafa, 1973, Cameroon

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.

**Readings; Acts 2:1-21, Psalm 104:26- end, 1 Corinthians
12:3b-13, John 20:19-23**

REFLECTIONS

One of the striking things about the story of Pentecost is that the multi-national crowd in Jerusalem all heard the good news in their own languages. Pentecost is a celebration of many voices, united in one God. Rather than one longer reflection this week, we have six shorter ones, all written by different members of our church community. You might want to read one a day over this coming week – and a different reflection will be available on the dial-up phone line each day. (Just for this week, that means there is no separate set of readings and reflections for Wednesday.)

You can listen to Sally Nash reading this reflection on SUNDAY, by phoning 0121 227 5533.

‘Stuck inside these four walls, sent inside forever...’

This opening line to the Paul McCartney song *Band on the run* came into my head as I sat working, looking out into our garden. I felt trapped. Mum was in hospital 100 miles away and I couldn’t contact her or visit. I had work deadlines to hit but the sun was shining, the sky was blue and I wanted to be out there, not stuck inside here.

I was socialized to be compliant as many girls of my age would have been and I have looked carefully at the guidance. I waited until Wednesday June 3rd before taking more than one walk! I want to keep safe and keep others safe but the four walls wear me down. And being ‘sent inside’ makes me feel

naughty – a remnant from the days of being sent to my room as a child!

I know it's not for ever but some opportunities may never be there again and my heart bleeds for those who are missing those moments that are so significant in transitioning from one stage of life to another. Leaving remotely is not the same as leaving in person, saying goodbye on zoom is not the same as a hug, communion and prophetic prayers in person, not to mention eating lots of cake. The little encounters are what I am missing most, those opportunities to praise, encourage, honour students to their families, the shared coffee, seeing the smile of those who don't do zoom so I never see.

In the midst of all of this is Pentecost. Pentecost, with a wild, untamed Holy Spirit released into our world, to be our comforter, our advocate, our challenger, our inspirer, our guide. I can only try to imagine what it might have been like on that first Pentecost, the wind, the fire, signs from heaven, the incongruity of speaking in a strange tongue. My head would have tried to make sense of it, to rationalize, but there would be no rational explanation. Hope and joy would overwhelm me as I heard those familiar words from Joel:

I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy. Your old men will have dreams. Your young men will see visions. In those days I will pour out my Spirit on those who serve me, men and women alike.

That day had finally arrived!

But what about Pentecost in lockdown? Can I find that hope and joy in me in the midst of a season of lament? Do I dare to prophesy? I know the Holy Spirit as my comforter in this period but has the fire been dampened as I struggle with the challenges and constraints? As a young adult I read and re-read 2 Timothy 1.7 'God didn't give us a spirit that makes us weak and fearful. He gave us a spirit that gives us power and love'. In this strange season I have struggled with feeling weak and fearful at times and been frustrated with powerlessness rather than understanding it as vulnerability when I need to be more open to God. But as Pentecost approaches I need to remember that the Holy Spirit is powerful and loving within me to enable me to make choices, to act, to speak and possibly most importantly, to think about a world where God's kingdom is becoming more visible, where we as Christians present a vision of what might be not settling for what is, where we speak in a new tongue but one perhaps of uplifting, encouraging, inspiring, listening as we seek to join in the work of the Holy Spirit in the place that God has planted us.

I may be stuck inside these four walls for a little longer but the Holy Spirit is not constrained and my prayers, my words, my actions can spread further afield as I seek to be led by the Spirit not crushed by the world and when lockdown has ended emerge to a new world where some of the compassion, consideration, slowness, community, solidarity remains.

Sally Nash

You can listen to Paul Wright reading this reflection on MONDAY, by phoning 0121 227 5533.

The receiving of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost has always made me think of a wonderful gathering, a party, a celebration with amazement and overwhelming joy. A huge whoosh of noise, of colour, of excitement, and of wonder. I found it hard reading this in the context of lockdown when we are physically apart and celebrations, parties and gatherings are not possible. This is one of the things I'm missing the most and struggling with a lack of knowing when this will be possible again. But during this time, I have felt the Holy Spirit emerging and a movement of the Spirit in our community, and amongst many of our neighbours. 1 Corinthians 12:4-7 speaks loudly and clearly to this:

4 There are different kinds of gifts, but they are all from the same Spirit. 5 There are different ways to serve but the same Lord to serve. 6 And there are different ways that God works through people but the same God. God works in all of us in everything we do. 7 Something from the Spirit can be seen in each person, for the common good.

There has been an abundance of people using their gifts, finding gifts, or having their gifts recognised. NHS staff, care workers, other key workers & neighbours. All of us having a gift to give and something to share. I have also sensed a oneness around a common good and a coming together. Some people have drawn parallels with the Blitz, but I feel the parallels with this Biblical image is more attune to what we are experiencing.

Alongside bearing witness to this, my thoughts are drawn to the time beyond Covid19. What will be left behind and what from this time will we take into a 'new' normal? Just before breathing the Holy Spirit upon the disciples, Jesus instructs: 'As the father sent me, so I send you'. Jesus is specifying that receiving the Holy Spirit is a dynamic thing, an instruction to do, to act. But Jesus crucially says just before this 'Shalom be with you'. It was a commonly used greeting, but it is something incredibly profound. By saying 'Shalom be with you', Jesus is saying 'may you be full of well-being'. May you have wholeness and completeness, health, safety, and prosperity.

At the moment getting through Covid19 is our common good and our oneness. But what about when it ends, or at least becomes less of a risk? Jesus reminds us by saying 'Shalom be with you' that alongside the Holy Spirit, there is a Godly vision of how the world should be: Wholeness, completeness, wellbeing, and a prosperity where everybody should have enough to flourish.

I live in hope for a time for gatherings, parties, and celebrations. Gatherings with many languages and where all are welcome. Within these, and crucially beyond these, we are called to draw attention to where the Holy Spirit is working within and through us and our neighbours, pay attention to the gifts within each of us, and to pursue the common good: Shalom for our neighbours, our neighbourhood, and our world.

Paul Wright

You can listen to Joy Curtis reading this reflection on TUESDAY, by phoning 0121 227 5533.

I have chosen to reflect on the reading from 1 Corinthians 12 because of how this scripture speaks to me. The reading gives me direction and hope in order to follow my faith. The call to worship and follow the Risen Christ has never ceased. The opportunities to serve Christ are endless. The reading takes into account my life experiences and the challenges I face as a practising Christian.

Basically, the passage has taken me on a fact-finding mission and self-discovery whilst enhancing my journey of faith. I think it is perhaps unusual for the Spirit to have been mentioned so many times in a relatively short reading. Gifts from the Holy Spirit have also been given prominence.

What is most striking however, is stated in verse 12: Christ is described as a “single body, made up of different parts”. I shall be exploring the messages behind these statements.

The more I read this; the more I have come to the realization that it would not be Pentecost if the Holy Spirit was not given some prominence. This lesson makes no exception. I see the Holy Spirit as messengers of God who appear to be quite active and very busy in doing and delegating some of God’s work to those who wish to follow Christ.

The Spirit in a sense has an all-inclusive “master plan” for how the Kingdom of God should be constructed and operated using all different kinds of people and skills to make it happen. A kind of specialization being run via a cooperative if you like.

As people and followers of the Living God, we all have our own part to play carrying out God's work so we are all given particular gifts in doing so.

I'm pretty sure everyone likes to receive a gift not least give one in return, whether at Christmas or special celebrations. However, when we talk about gifts given by the Holy Spirit it's a different kind of gift. Verse 11 tells us that "a different kind of gift is given to each person" - Dare I say, God never wants one back in return!

Ephesians 4:12 explains that these gifts are to be used to prepare God's people for carrying out his work (service) so as to achieve the common good, i.e. to spread the love of God and perpetuate the Kingdom. Gifts from the Holy Spirit can come in any shape or forms. What is important is that they are used in doing God's work such as being caring and compassionate to His flock.

Sometimes, I work with people who have been bereaved, having lost a loved one. I offer comfort, in the sense that I sit with them and listen to their stories. I am the shoulder they cry on when the pain is too much to bear.

I am the person who does not judge them for whatever reason. Is this my gift? Matthew 5:4 states, "those who mourn shall be comforted". This is what Jesus would like me to do with this gift.

There are many stories in the Bible where Jesus comforted people. Mary and Martha being one of such stories. Hopefully I am taking a small step in walking the way of Jesus.

For example, when the spirit speaks in unfamiliar tongues, interpreters are needed to spread the message so they would have some understanding of God's word being conveyed.

Apart from Spiritual gifts, the writer tells us that, "Christ is made up of many parts" v12. Brothers and sisters, this is our calling in which we can be one of those parts. There is room in Christ for each and every one of us, regardless of race, colour, creed or gender.

The risen Christ can work with any type of difference or diversity. In the Hebrew Bible, Genesis 1:26 reinforces this in the sense that "God created humankind in his own image" and I would argue that we are bound to be different, but created out of the love of God which binds us together in Christ's Kingdom.

This, however begs the question if Jesus is ready and willing to have each and every one of us in His Kingdom on equal footing, is it really possible to have one element of society to have dominion over another, enslaving and treating them less favourably whilst professing to be followers of the Christ Jesus?

I find this very challenging as it goes against everything that Jesus stands against.

God is love, God is kind, God is compassionate. God loves us "warts and all".

Joy Curtis

You can listen to Al Barrett reading this reflection on WEDNESDAY, by phoning 0121 227 5533.

the fasting of Lent has been indefinitely extended
the grieving and long aching waiting of Holy Saturday
remains

Easter continues to dawn bewilderingly slowly,
the rising sun travels on,
each glimpse of resurrection fleeting, piecemeal,
each another crack
through which the light might get in,
we wonder,
but as yet the jigsaw makes little sense

the Ascension has been and gone,
been and gone is Jesus,
uplifted, glorified, reunited with his God and our God
and we who followed are left behind,
fasting,
grieving,
wondering,
waiting

and now they say it is Pentecost,
the day when they were all together again in one place,
when locked doors are blown open,
when fear is put to the flames,
and when across our great divides

we all hear the sound of each other's voices
and, at last, understand
the day we have been longing, aching, waiting for
arrives, unplanned, unprepared for
catching us unawares yet again
interrupting
the normal day after day after day after day after day
with something new
caught by breathing
spreading like wildfire
poured out on all flesh
on all flesh
young and old
women and men
even slaves
of empire's crushing systems
even workers
sent out unprotected
even prisoners
of lockdown fear
even the breathless earth itself
and the wildest of its creatures
even the hungry
even the grieving
even the aching
even the bewildered
even me
even you

on all flesh
the Spirit breathes
the earth breathes
we breathe
and we notice
and we wonder
and we realise
that we are all connected
that we all need
all of us
all flesh
all gifts
none too small
too insignificant
too strange
too old
too young
too scared
too scarred
too hidden
too shielded
to be heard
and seen
the gift
of themselves –
of myself
of yourself –

just what God's renewed world
is waiting for
breathe

Al Barrett

You can listen to Penny Hall reading this reflection on THURSDAY, by phoning 0121 227 5533.

In his letter to the early Church in Corinth, Paul is explaining that the Holy Spirit gives many gifts; different ones to different people. All spiritual gifts come from the Holy Spirit, so they are all important. If the Spirit determines our different gifts, we don't have to be the same.

Last week during Mental Health Awareness week, Janey made a short video each day. One of them particularly struck me. It was based on the quote "Comparison is the Thief of Joy".

She talks about the dangers of comparing ourselves to others who may seem to be 'better at' or 'doing more' than us. We may think that we are less able than someone else, or that they have a gift which is more important than ours, but each of us has something different that is special, especially when we use our gifts for others.

Paul says that the manifestation of the Spirit is for the Common Good. Whether our gifts are knowledge, wisdom or something else, we need to share them to encourage and support others. In Hodge Hill, I have seen the sharing of many gifts and skills given generously for the benefit of many.

Creative skills such as cooking for Bring and Share meals, the Real Junk Food Project which brings people together over a meal; the Theatre Group where local people's skills and passions entertain us all; hosting events, listening, sharing ideas, learning together, just being part of a community that nurtures and encourages each other are just a few of these shared gifts.

During this Lockdown period, we have had to rethink how we can use our gifts 'for the common good'. Many people have been checking in with their neighbours, keeping them connected and being encouraging and supportive during this difficult time. Neighbours have been shopping for food and collecting prescriptions for each other, cooking food for each other, having 2metre apart doorstep conversations, sharing books, jigsaws, garden tools and much more. A generosity and kindness is being seen that has not been so obvious before the arrival of COVID-19. It may be that people who have felt that their gifts were not needed, wanted or were not important enough to share in the past have realised that even small kindnesses can make such a difference to someone who cannot leave their home.

We are all parts of the one body and every one of us has a part to play. I hope and pray that this new age of awareness of our neighbours and sharing of gifts will be something that will continue to grow well into the future.

Penny Hall

You can listen to Rafi Barrett reading this reflection (on Acts 2:1-21) on FRIDAY, by phoning 0121 227 5533.

How did this passage connect with your own experience of life?

It reminded me of my experience of starting at secondary school, and learning from people who come from lots of different cultures. We are such good friends because we are so different, and all bring our different experiences of the kingdom of God – even our different experiences of God from our different faiths.

I know that I am being empowered by so many people, and they encourage me to go out and live life as well as I can.

What we do and how we live is much better when we listen to everybody's ideas, and everybody's experiences, than if we just try pushing ahead without listening to others.

I'm reminded, reading this story, that God loves me, and gives me the confidence to be me.

Rafi Barrett



Pentecost by Angus Kelly.

12 Disciples, Tongues of flame. Different sizes and colours represent the diversity of the pentecost community

Table View Methodist Church in Cape Town, South Africa, celebrates a theological and symbolic journey through the Bible through simple, yet meaningful stained glass. They were designed by Rev. Angus Kelly in 2018 and installed by Anika Van de Merwe of Silverstain Stained Glass Studios in Advent 2019.