



The
United
Reformed
Church

The United Reformed Church in Lion Walk Christ Church United Reformed Church The United Reformed Church at Chappel

Sunday 5th June 2022

Our worship today includes the sacrament of Holy Communion. You are warmly invited to participate, and I'd invite you to provide yourself with a little bread and wine, or a cracker and some fruit juice, or any thing that can symbolise for you the body and blood of Jesus.

Call to Worship:

Spirit of Truth and Judgement,
Who alone can cast out the powers that grip our world,
Give us your discernment
that we may know the way that leads to peace,
Through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Create in me a clean heart, O God,
and put a new and right spirit within me;
Do not cast me away from your presence,
and do not take your holy spirit from me;
Restore to me the joy of your salvation
and sustain in me a willing spirit.

Prayer/Meditation:

God of Love, we celebrate with wonder the Pentecost event which so transformed the lives of the apostles; we remember this wonderful mysterious event in which their experience was revolutionised, their expectations turned upside down, their attitudes changed for ever; one moment consumed by fear, the next radiating confidence; one moment uncertain of the future, the next sure of their calling; one moment wrestling with doubt, the next full of faith; one moment hiding behind locked doors, the next preaching boldly to the crowds.

We remember that, on that day there were many who mocked, pouring scorn on the disciples' experience, claiming they had drunk too much wine or that they were simply out of their minds. We remember how their faith was re-ignited, how they were empowered for service so that they came out of hiding and went among the crowds boldly witnessing to their faith and declaring their allegiance to Christ. We remember how the Spirit worked in the Church then, prompting, guiding, cleansing, invigorating, challenging; and how the Spirit works in the Church today, equipping, enabling, teaching, inspiring, breathing new life into old structures, bringing fresh insights to established tradition, and firing your people to imaginative ventures built on the foundations of the past. We remember how ordinary people accomplished the most extraordinary things, how those who had been weak and afraid found the courage to endure suffering and death for the sake of faith.

May the Holy Spirit come to us too, filling us with peace and a desire to serve with humility of mind and gentleness of soul. May the Holy Spirit come to us too, setting us on fire with love,

with a burning desire to work for the Kingdom. May the Holy Spirit come to us too, breathing new life into us, filling us with energy and enthusiasm for the service of Christ.

We give thanks for those moments in our lives when we catch glimpses of the Spirit of God; those strange and exciting moments we occasionally experience which affect our whole lives, giving us joy and fulfillment and understanding we never imagined possible. And we give thanks for the gift of the Spirit - an experience which changed the lives of the apostles, which has changed the lives of countless believers across the centuries, and which has power to reshape the lives of people today. May our hearts and minds be open to the presence of the Spirit, that we may be challenged, inspired and strengthened in our faith.

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. Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the Kingdom, the power and the glory for ever. Amen

Reading: Genesis 11:1-9

Hymn 306

Spirit of flame, whose living glow
was known to prophet, saint and seer,
where faith is cold thy fire bestow,
where love is distant draw thou near!
Apostles ventured in thy power;
so fill us in this present hour.

Spirit of peace, for healing grace
a parched world waits in dry despair;
break through the clouds that hide thy face,
for hope unconquered knows thee there:
humble our pride and come as guest,
most hidden and most manifest.

Spirit of truth, thy blinding light
must needs be tempered to our eyes;
yet dawn upon our darkened sight
with freedom as our dearest prize:
with torch of truth held high above,
help us to cast out fear by love.

Spirit of love, all souls are thine,
redeemed and claimed by love unpriced;
O seeking love, do thou incline
our hearts to love and follow Christ;
Love that is stronger than our fears,
uplift our hearts through coming years.

Reading: Acts 2:1-13

Reflection:

That first Pentecost happened in the city of Jerusalem some time after the death of Jesus of Nazareth, a time when the Jesus movement had begun to capture the imaginations of increasing numbers of people both Jewish and Gentile. But behind and under the story in the book of Acts is another story from another place and another time. It's a story that the first readers of the book of Acts would have known very well, and when they read Acts they would have understood it in the light of the Genesis story about the city of Babel. It might help us if we do the same, and look at the Pentecost story through the lens of the Babel story.

The story of Babel is told by our ancient Hebrew forebears in faith to explain the variety and diversity of peoples and languages and nations. How is it, they asked even then, that humans must have had one common beginning, and yet, look at us - people speak so many languages, appear in so many colours, are spread all over the world? How is it, that if we all at some time came from one common beginning, we can't understand one another - that when strangers from another land speak, it sounds like babbling to us? This is the story they told:

There was time when everyone still had one language, if you said, "bird," everyone knew bird, and rock was "rock" and sun was "sun." But the people decided to make a name for themselves. They were tired of trusting in God, and they weren't all that good at it anyway. They were tired of letting God be the source of their security and identity, so they decided to build a city, and in the middle of that city they would build a tower reaching up to the heavens and bring themselves some fame. God heard about this plan and said, "This is not good." And here's the amazing part: God said, "Nothing they propose to do will now be impossible for them." In other words, if people can communicate with one another, they'll be able to do anything they put their minds to. That's how powerful the ability to communicate is. So, to save humans from themselves, God scrambles up their language. Bird is no longer "bird." Now it's also oiseau and avis and vogel. And sun is also shemesh and soleil and helios. The people can no longer communicate; they become strangers to one another. They scatter around the world and develop their own societies with their own languages, cultures and even religions.

Now come to the city of Jerusalem. It's 50 days after Jesus' resurrection. Jesus has told his followers to wait together in the city because Jesus will send the Holy Spirit to be with them, to comfort them and strengthen them and guide them into all truth.

But Jesus' followers aren't the only ones in the city. Jewish pilgrims from all over the world have come to Jerusalem, because what became our Pentecost began on a Jewish holiday, 50 days after Passover, a yearly festival when the first fruit of the wheat harvest were presented, and God's covenant with Israel was celebrated and renewed. This was one of the three great festivals of the year. So faithful Jews have gathered from all over the world. Jerusalem is buzzing with the sounds of a multitude of languages.

Suddenly, to the followers of Jesus, comes the Holy Spirit. First the rush of a violent wind. Then tongues of fire rest on each of them. Then, as they are filled with the Holy Spirit, they begin to speak in other languages. Galileans speaking Persian and Latin, Arabic and Elamite. All those strangers from all over the world can hear their own native language being spoken. They can hear and understand in their very own language.

If you've ever traveled to a place where they don't speak your language, you know what a grace that was.

In Jerusalem on Pentecost, through the power of the Holy Spirit and the gift of being able to communicate, the obstacle of Babel was undone. On that day, the diversity of languages was not a curse, but a marvel. And this is important: God undid Babel, not by bringing the whole world back into speaking one language. Pentecost affirms the diversity of the world, the richness of the multitude of peoples and languages, and the gift when you hear and understand, when people can communicate, whether across the barriers of languages, or the barrier of simply being one stranger speaking with another.

The Book of Common Prayer summarizes the power of the Holy Spirit like this: "The Holy Spirit leads us into all truth and enables us to grow in the likeness of Christ." And "we recognize the presence of the Holy Spirit when we confess Jesus Christ as Lord and are brought into love and harmony with God, ourselves, with our neighbours, and with all creation." In other words, we recognize the presence of the Holy Spirit when we stop being strangers - strangers with God, ourselves, our neighbours, and all creation.

Today we celebrate the gifts of Pentecost. We acknowledge and rejoice in the gifts of the Holy Spirit. We recognize diversity as a good thing. We believe we can, we must, communicate - speaking and listening and making friends out of strangers. As the church and as disciples of Jesus, we make promises to seek and serve Christ in all persons, not just people who look like us or talk like us or believe like us. We promise to respect the dignity of all people. We promise to love our neighbours - even people strange to us - as we love ourselves.

This kind of love - this kind of welcome of others, speaking and listening to others - will look very strange to people outside the family. It did on that first Pentecost. About all this harmony amongst strangers and communication across barriers and love flying around like tongues of fire caught by the wind, onlookers said, "What's going on here? They must be drunk!" When we're living with the love of life and the love of others God makes possible, when we are emboldened to work for justice and peace among all people, when we delight in diversity, and see no one, ultimately, as a stranger, but rather as someone who bears the very image of God, they may wonder what's got into us. They may ridicule us. They may think we're a little strange.

Or perhaps they'll want to join us, being brought into love and harmony with God, ourselves, our neighbours, and all creation, and we'll be strangers no more.

Hymn 329

There's a spirit in the air,
telling Christians everywhere:
'Praise the love that Christ revealed,
living, working in our world.'

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.

When believers break the bread,
when a hungry child is fed,

praise the love that Christ revealed,
living, working in our world.

Still the Spirit gives us light,
seeing wrong and setting right:
God in Christ has come to stay.
Live tomorrow's life today.

When a stranger's not alone,
where the homeless find a home,
praise the love that Christ revealed,
living, working in our world.

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.

There's a Spirit in the air,
calling people everywhere:
'Praise the love that Christ revealed,
living, working in our world.'

Communion:

In our homes, apart yet together, we gather at this table...
where bread and cup are transformed by the Spirit of God
into a meal of love and grace;
a supper of visions and dreams,
a table where all people are welcome.

Before the earth was formed, the Spirit of God swirled through the voids and shadows. As
humans were created, the breath of God filled the lungs of Adam and the soul of Eve.

On this day of Pentecost,
when we celebrate the breath of the Spirit coming upon the disciples, we invite the Spirit to
come upon these elements of bread and cup, and upon us, God's children, and we give our
thanks in singing praises with the saints and disciples of before, saying with them:

**Holy, holy, holy,
Lord, God of power and might.
Heaven and earth are filled with your glory.
Hosanna in the highest.
Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord.
Hosanna to God in the highest.**

God of winds, pour out your Spirit to make this time come alive for us.
Make this symbolic meal awaken our sleepy hearts and stagnant souls.
May this time of eating and drinking be one
where we stir from our sadness and anxiety
and rise from our hopelessness.

May we begin to celebrate visions and animate the dreams
that have only been alive in our minds.
As we share this meal, let us remember our Lord Jesus Christ
that on the night that he was betrayed he had supper with his friends.
It was a solemn time around the table.
Breaking bread.
Drinking from the cup.
Jesus asking to remember him in our eating and drinking.

There was a time to mourn followed by a time to dance.

After the day of Resurrection,
the disciples ate on the beach with the risen Christ
Celebrating new life, new hope, new vitality.
And on this Pentecost, as we come to the table,
let us celebrate the Spirit of Resurrection
and the promise of fullness and depth in our own lives.

Gracious God pour out your Holy Spirit upon us
and upon these gifts of bread and wine,
that the bread we break and the cup we bless
may be the communion of the body and blood of Jesus Christ, our Lord.

By your Spirit unite us with the living Christ
that we may be his body of in the world. Amen.

The bread which we break is the communion of the body of Christ ...

Take and eat. This is the body of Christ; do this in remembrance of him.

The cup of blessing which we bless is the communion of the blood of Christ ...

This cup is the new covenant in the blood of Christ; do this in remembrance of him.

Spirit of God, who fed the multitudes,
provided the manna in the wilderness,
and blessed the bread and cup today,
we give great thanks for the meal eaten
and the grace so freely offered.
Inspire us as we move forward this day
and encourage us to transform our dreams into reality.

Spirit of Love, you pour out your life into young and old,
we pray for all those who are vulnerable, marginalised,
and abused because of their age.

May your love inspire our love in our community
so that all are included.

Spirit of joy, you pour our your energy into the poor and
oppressed,

we pray for all those who are exploited, downtrodden,
and made slaves because of our economy.

May your joy of freedom drive our work for justice
so that all are liberated

Spirit of peace, you pour out your comfort into all who
are in conflict,

we pray for all those who are caught up in war, violence
and estranged because of hostility.

May your peace lead us towards reconciliation,
so that all are living in unity.

Spirit of healing and reconciliation, pour out your grace upon all who suffer sickness and stress,
we pray for those who are alone, those who are in pain,

those who are confused, those who are uncertain of their future.

May your comfort be with those whom now we name in our hearts...

(Short silence)

Spirit of God, be upon us and all people, now and always. Amen

I invite you now to spend a few moments with your own prayer, in words or in silence; or simply
in reflecting upon the stories we have read and the words we have heard in our worship today.

Hear our prayer, which we offer in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen

Hymn 324

Holy Spirit, ever dwelling
in the glorious realms of light;
Holy Spirit, ever brooding
o'er a world of gloom and night;
Holy Spirit, ever forming
in the Church the mind of Christ;
thee we praise with endless worship
for thy fruit and gifts unpriced.

Holy Spirit, ever working
through the Church's ministry;
quick'ning, strength'ning, and absolving,
setting captive sinners free;
Holy Spirit, ever binding
age to age, and soul to soul,
in a fellowship unending
thee we worship and extol.

Benediction:

May God's breath stream within us.

May God's breath renew us.

May God's breath invigorate us.

That we may walk with confidence into the coming days.

And may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit
be with each one of us, and with all those we love. Today and for ever more. Amen

