

**Call to Worship**

As we begin our worship these words are for thinking: 'Come out from the shadows and into the light of morning. Come, empty and depleted, to be filled with God's Spirit. Come, sober in sorrow, and leave drunk with joy. Come, expecting nothing, but ready to be surprised. Above all, come, and know that you are welcome here.'

**Hymn – Be still, for the presence of the Lord,**

**Prayer of Adoration & Praise**

We clear our heads, we still our hearts and we come before God in prayer, let us pray.

Lord God, as we greet you today may we know your Spirit rushing into our lives, surrounding us with love and with peace, with hope and with joy.

There are no barriers that can prevent your Spirit from entering our lives.

And so we worship and adore you in the knowledge of that Spirit surrounding us right where we are, transforming our lives and the world around.

In the knowledge of your healing Spirit, we confess that we have not always served you well. We serve you in fits and starts, singing your praises one moment, forgetting your goodness the next.

God keep us mindful of you so that we more fully see you at work in our everyday and more readily respond to your invitation to be involved in that work. May your Spirit keep on nudging us to love and serve you by loving and serving each other.

For all this we ask in Jesus' name, who taught us when we pray together to say; Our Father in Heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins as we forgive others that sin against us. Save us from the time of trial and

deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours, now and forever. Amen.

### **Reading: Acts 2: 1 – 21**

2 When the day of Pentecost came, all the believers were gathered together in one place. <sup>2</sup> Suddenly there was a noise from the sky which sounded like a strong wind blowing, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. <sup>3</sup> Then they saw what looked like tongues of fire which spread out and touched each person there. <sup>4</sup> They were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to talk in other languages, as the Spirit enabled them to speak.

<sup>5</sup> There were Jews living in Jerusalem, religious people who had come from every country in the world. <sup>6</sup> When they heard this noise, a large crowd gathered. They were all excited, because all of them heard the believers talking in their own languages. <sup>7</sup> In amazement and wonder they exclaimed, “These people who are talking like this are Galileans! <sup>8</sup> How is it, then, that all of us hear them speaking in our own native languages? <sup>9</sup> We are from Parthia, Media, and Elam; from Mesopotamia, Judea, and Cappadocia; from Pontus and Asia, <sup>10</sup> from Phrygia and Pamphylia, from Egypt and the regions of Libya near Cyrene. Some of us are from Rome, <sup>11</sup> both Jews and Gentiles converted to Judaism, and some of us are from Crete and Arabia—yet all of us hear them speaking in our own languages about the great things that God has done!” <sup>12</sup> Amazed and confused, they kept asking each other, “What does this mean?” <sup>13</sup> But others made fun of the believers, saying, “These people are drunk!”

<sup>14</sup> Then Peter stood up with the other eleven apostles and in a loud voice began to speak to the crowd: “Fellow Jews and all of you who live in Jerusalem, listen to me and let me tell you what this means. <sup>15</sup> These people are not drunk, as you suppose; it is only nine o'clock in the morning. <sup>16</sup> Instead, this is what the prophet Joel spoke about:

<sup>17</sup> ‘This is what I will do in the last days, God says: I will pour out my Spirit on everyone. Your sons and daughters will proclaim my message; your young men will see visions, and your old men will have dreams. <sup>18</sup> Yes, even on my servants,

both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will proclaim my message. <sup>19</sup> I will perform miracles in the sky above and wonders on the earth below. There will be blood, fire, and thick smoke; <sup>20</sup> the sun will be darkened, and the moon will turn red as blood, before the great and glorious Day of the Lord comes. <sup>21</sup> And then, whoever calls out to the Lord for help will be saved.'

## **Hymn – Enemy of Apathy (She sits like a bird)**

### **Sermon – ‘The Gift’**

Have you ever flown on a private plane, driven a Rolls Royce or dined with the Queen? I have not, and, if I am honest, I very much doubt I ever will. It seems that some things in life are reserved for a select few, whilst most of us must make do with more, so called, “run of the mill” facilities and occasions.

The people who lived in Old Testament believed that this was true of the Spirit of God. They were convinced that it was a rare and special gift which only a privileged elite would experience. There was no way in the world they would be filled by that Spirit; such an honour went to those like Gideon, Samuel, Isaiah, Elijah, Ezekiel and others of a similar stature.

For the “rank and file”, God would always be one step removed. Access to him mediated by Priest and Temple. The words of the Prophet Joel, wonderful though they sounded, must have raised more than a few eyebrows when first spoken, for they postulated an entirely new relationship with God.

Yet, that is the relationship experienced by the Apostles on the so-called Day of Pentecost, and it is a gift offered to you and me in turn. For God is not remote and detached but can be experienced as a living reality within – encouraging, teaching, empowering, guiding – ever at work in our lives. There is no favouritism with God. One privilege is for us all to enjoy: the inner presence of the Holy Spirit – surely the greatest privilege, the greatest gift there can be!

Now, our reading from the Book of Acts opens with the Apostles gathered for the celebration of Pentecost. This is a celebration which takes place fifty days

after the Passover and is also known as “the feast of weeks” or Shavout. The festival celebrated the “first fruits” of the early harvest in spring. Suddenly, we read in verse 2, that a sound like that of a strong wind came and blew through the house where they were sitting. They were filled with the Holy Spirit, which seemed to them like divided tongues of fire and enabled them to talk to others in their own language.

Many people from many places were gathered in Jerusalem for the Feast of Weeks, and it seemed that everyone could understand the Apostles. Some were amazed at this and others were a little cynical and accused the Apostles of being drunk. Peter stands and raises his voice to speak to the crowds: *‘Fellow Jews and all of you who live in Jerusalem, listen to me and let me tell you what this means. <sup>15</sup> These people are not drunk, as you suppose; it is only nine o'clock in the morning...’* – and he went on to speak to them of visions and power that will come to all – young and old, men and women, slaves and free.

Today, when we celebrate Pentecost, our focus is not on the Feast which was originally celebrated, but on this event, we read of in Acts – the giving of the Holy Spirit. This is the gift that Jesus had promised the Apostles they would receive, the thing that would be their Advocate, their Counsellor, helping them to make the transition from followers of Jesus to those who would be leading and guiding and sharing with others. In a way, the Holy Spirit is the gift that helps them with all their other gifts. It is the foundation for their work, the source of their confidence in their abilities. After all, being filled with the Holy Spirit is to be filled up with God’s own self, right inside of you. God dwelling in you should certainly inspire you with confidence! On the Day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit is the gift that is available to each one of us.

The same could be said of our gifts from God. God gifts us in so many ways and each one of us has unique talents and abilities. Yet, there are times when we act as though we would rather give the gifts God has given us to someone else. Or we pretend we do not have them. Or that we do not like them. Or that we do not need them. We try to ignore our gifts, insisting that we cannot really use them.

When we do this, we are acting in a hurtful way. We are telling God that we do not like the blessings that He has bestowed on us. We are unappreciative. These gifts that God has given to us, come not as burdens for us to bear, but as gifts given out of love. Imagine how special it is for each one of us to have our own unique combination of gifts, skills and talents. Imagine the love and care signified in God's special attention on each one of us. God just wants us to receive, use and enjoy our gifts with open hearts.

For me, the Day of Pentecost is the day the Apostles finally begin to understand, after all those days of wondering what exactly it was that Jesus was trying to teach them. They finally start believing, after all this time, that God has indeed chosen them, called them, named them and gifted them to share the Good News. Pentecost is the day they finally open the gifts that God has given to them, the day they finally start trying out their talents and skills for the first time.

You could say that Pentecost is everybody's birthday, as everybody receives the gift of the Holy Spirit. Everyone gets exactly what they need most from God. It is a celebration, a grand party – no wonder some accused them of being drunk. You and I have also been invited to that party. Again, and again, God asks us to take part in this Pentecost celebration.

Each week we dedicate our financial gifts to God – and I do not, in any way, underestimate the crucial nature of these gifts for the ability of our Church to do and be in ministry. Yet, gifts of money are not the only gifts we are asked to give. We are also asked to give to the work of the Church, to the work of the Gospel, the other gifts with which God has blessed us.

For each one of us represents many unique combinations of gifts from God. There is no one whom God has not gifted – firstly with gifts of grace, unconditional love, and the Holy Spirit. Secondly, with specific gifts that make us who we are. The best gifts are the ones that are used, the ones that are love, cherished and appreciated.

Today, I want us all to think hard and to think honestly about the gifts that God has given to us. Some of these gifts we do not mind using but other gifts we

tend to hide, because we are afraid to show off what God has given us. On this Pentecost Sunday, I want you to be filled with the comforting presence of the Spirit that enables you to open your gifts, love your gifts and share your gifts and bring deep joy straight to the heart of God.

So, today is the birthday of our faith – the birthday of the Church. The Church is not walls, or stain glass windows or pews or doctrines. The Church is the people – the living stones – the girls, the boys, the women and the men. The young, the not so young and everyone in between. How can we ensure that we use the gifts we have been given by our gifting God?

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

### **Hymn – By faith we see the hand of God**

#### **Prayer for Ourselves and Others**

We unite our hearts again in prayer, let us pray.

Lord God, we thank you that when we grieve and find it hard to pray, when we cannot find the words, your Spirit intercedes, with groans too deep for words.

Spirit intercede for us now.

Sometimes we lose heart at all the suffering we witness, both near and far, but may we always see you wherever your children suffer, wherever the earth cries out in anguish.

You, the God of all creation, tear open the heavens and dwell among your people.

Give us courage to go into all the places you already are.

Remind us that nothing done in the name of love is ever wasted and that all that we do for the least of these, we do for you.

We pray for your healing for all of creation. We pray for unity in your church so that, together with you, we may heal the world.

We pray for all who lead and give wise counsel. May they lead with justice and compassion and build on a foundation of love.

And we pray for all whom we know, struggling this day— with loss, with disappointment, with illness, with bereavement, with lack of hope and purpose.

Spirit of God, blow change through our hearts, our lives, our world. Your kingdom come on earth as in heaven. Amen

### **Hymn – Lord the light of your love is shining**

#### **Benediction**

Sisters and brothers in Christ, go into the world. Realise the visions. Fulfil the dreams. See new visions. Dream new dreams. And as you do, know that the Holy Spirit is guiding you and encouraging you every step of the way. And May the Blessing of God Almighty, Father, Son and Spirit rest upon you and all whom you love this day and always. Amen.

### **Closing Song – Send us out**