

ST. MARY OF NAZARETH /ST. FRANCIS OF ASSISI – WEST WICKHAM

31st May 2020: Pentecost Sunday

Alternative 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.

Hazel writes:

Today is **Pentecost Sunday** - sometimes known as the birthday of the church. At 11am this morning we'll have a birthday party on Zoom – bring your own coffee and cake. There was an invitation sent last week with instructions for joining both with a computer and by telephone. The meeting will be open from 10.45 and we will start at 11am with finding out what people have appreciated in the on-line and paper-based materials that have been produced over the past couple of months. As our current situation is likely to continue for some time, this will be an important part of setting our way forward as God's church here in West Wickham.

There will also be an opportunity at the end for small groups to meet and catch up with each other. If it works well, we may make this a regular event - once a month maybe.

Christian Aid Week – Thank you for all the donations made to Christian Aid. Together with our friends from the Methodist Church we have raised a total of £2,209, increased to £2,650.25 with the addition of Gift Aid.

Resources and updates for the week ahead – An audio file of the sermon and a video of the service have been posted to the websites for today. All other files have been combined together and posted as a pew sheet which has been sent on paper to those who have told us that they are not on-line. Please tell someone if you know of somebody who is not accessing this material.

Other worship and resources that you might want to listen to or look at on Sunday:

- The Church of England's national virtual service will be available on their website at www.churchofengland.org.
- The BBC have the following programmes to watch and listen to:
 - Sunday Worship at 8.10am on Radio 4 from City Church Cardiff;
 - On BBC 1: a Pentecost Celebration at 10am; Sunday Worship at 11am with the Bishop of Hereford; Sunday morning stories at 11.30am and Songs of Praise at 1.15pm.

Any items for the joint pew sheet to Hazel and items for the websites to brian.griff19@btinternet.com.

Psalm 104:24

O LORD, how manifold are your works!
In wisdom you have made them all; the earth is full of your creatures.

First reading: Acts 2:1-21

A reading from the Acts of the Apostles.

When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. ² And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting.

³ Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. ⁴ All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.

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

residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, ¹⁰ Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, ¹¹ Cretans and Arabs—in our own languages we hear them speaking about God's deeds of power.' ¹² All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, 'What does this mean?'

¹³ But others sneered and said, 'They are filled with new wine.'

¹⁴ But 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. ¹⁵ Indeed, these are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only nine o'clock in the morning. ¹⁶ No, 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.

¹⁸ Even upon my slaves, both men and women, in those

days I will pour out my Spirit; and they shall prophesy.

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

²⁰ The sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood, before the coming of the Lord's great and glorious day. ²¹ Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved."

Gospel: John 20:19-23

Hear the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to John.

¹⁹ When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, 'Peace be with you.'

²⁰ After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. ²¹ Jesus said to them again, 'Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.' ²² When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit. ²³ If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.'

Sunday, May 31st: A Reflection for Pentecost

A couple of weeks ago, in the Zoom meeting with my home group, I was asked a question: Was the Holy Spirit there from the beginning? I gave a brief answer, but knowing that I was going to be preaching today, I said that I would look at it more detail in my Pentecost talk.

Part of the problem stems from the fact that we often refer to Pentecost as the Coming of the Holy Spirit, as though prior to that stupendous event, there had been no Holy Spirit. Yet even a cursory glance through the gospels shows that that is not the case.

In Luke's gospel, Mary is told by the angel at the Annunciation that the Holy Spirit will come upon her. When the child Jesus is presented in the Temple according to the Law of Moses, we're told that it had been revealed to Simeon by the Holy Spirit that he would not die until he had seen the Lord's anointed.

Then at the beginning of Mark's Gospel, the writer records that as Jesus is baptised, the Spirit descends on him like a dove and a few lines later adds that "The Spirit sent him out into the wilderness."

Matthew's Gospel concludes with the Jesus' instruction to his disciples that they should "go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit."

And at the beginning of John's gospel, John the Baptist is recorded as saying, "The man on whom you see the Spirit come down and remain is he who will baptise with the Holy Spirit." In fact, John's gospel has more to say about the Holy Spirit than do the other Gospels.

During the Last Supper, Jesus promises his disciples the gift of "the Counsellor, the Holy Spirit, who will teach you all things and remind you of everything I have said to you." (14. 26) And shortly after, Jesus says of the Counsellor, or Holy Spirit, that "when he comes he will convict the world in regard to sin and righteousness and judgement." (16.8)

Where John's gospel does differ from the others is that the gift of the Holy Spirit is conferred on the disciples before the end of the Gospel.

Mark doesn't refer to the coming of the Holy Spirit at all; Matthew hints at it when Jesus says, as he departs from his disciples, "And surely I am with you till the end of time." And in Luke, Jesus tells his disciples, as he leaves, "I am going to send you what my father has promised, but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high," a promise which is repeated at the beginning of Luke's other book, Acts,

when Jesus tells his disciples not to leave Jerusalem, because in a few days “you will be baptised with the Holy Spirit.”

But in John’s gospel, as we heard earlier, on the day of his resurrection, Jesus breathes on his disciples and says, “Receive the Holy Spirit.”

So the first part of the answer to the question, “Was the Holy Spirit there from the beginning?” is that he’s certainly at work throughout all the gospels. But what about the Old Testament?

In fact, the Holy Spirit is at work in the Old Testament right from the very beginning, when we’re told in the Creation Story in Genesis: “The Spirit of God was hovering over the waters,” although some versions do translate this as “A wind from God swept over the face of the waters.” The problem is that the Hebrew word for both “wind” and “spirit” is the same, “ruach.” And this Hebrew word can also mean “breath.”

Translators have to decide from the context which translation to use.

So the Jewish understanding is that the Holy Spirit was active in the Creation. John’s gospel also makes it clear that Jesus, the Word, was active in Creation: “He was in the beginning with God and all things came into being through him.” So it would appear that the three persons of the Holy Trinity were all present in Creation, but I’m trespassing on Hazel’s territory – she’s preaching next Sunday, Trinity Sunday, and I’m told she has a new understanding of the Trinity to share with you. Something to look forward to.

But back to the work of the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament. We’re told that it was the Holy Spirit that inspired some of the Old Testament heroes, such as Gideon, of whom it is written “The Spirit of the Lord came upon him,” (Judges 6.34) and similarly of Samson, and David, who claimed, “The Spirit of the Lord spoke through me; his word was on my tongue.” (2 Sam. 23.2)

But unsurprisingly it is in the prophets that we find Holy Spirit most at work, so Isaiah claims in one of his familiar prophecies, “The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because he has anointed me; he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the broken hearted... to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour,” words which Jesus declared himself as fulfilling at the beginning of his ministry.

So if the Holy Spirit is at work in this way throughout the Old Testament and all four gospels, what is that makes the events of Pentecost so special?

The answer is to be found in the words of another prophet, Joel, whom Peter quoted in his address to the crowds in Jerusalem: Joel writes, “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.”

And that’s what makes Pentecost so exciting. No longer will the Holy Spirit just inspire individuals like those I’ve mentioned already, the Gideons and the Davids and the Isaiahs. No, its inspiration will be there for ordinary people like you and me, like those whom Peter spoke to at the home of the Roman Centurion, Cornelius, in Caesarea, where we learn that while Peter was still speaking “the Holy Spirit fell on all who heard the word,” in the same way that it had fallen on Peter and the others on that first Pentecost.

So Pentecost is by no means the first appearance of the Holy Spirit, but it is the first time that it has come with power on a group of people, such as Jesus’ disciples, and given them the inspiration to start the process of taking the gospel to all corners of the world. That’s what makes Pentecost so exciting – it is literally the Birthday of the Church.

Peter concludes his first sermon preached in the power of the Holy Spirit with the words: “Repent, and be baptised every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”

In brief, the world needs to be made aware of the destructive power of sin, but that through repentance, forgiveness is possible, and that through the power of the Holy Spirit our lives can be transformed.

But what else do our readings this morning have to say to us here in West Wickham on 31st May, 2020?

Like the disciples on that first Whit Sunday we too are waiting, not only for the end of lockdown, but also I would suggest for a *fresh* invigoration from the Holy Spirit, for to pick up on Brian’s sermon last week, it is through the Holy Spirit that Jesus is let loose in the world. And we must also remember that all that happened at that first Pentecost is a means to an end, not the end itself.

In the same way that the Holy Spirit was given not to make the disciples more spiritual, more at peace with themselves, but to put fire in their belly, so that they would bear witness in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth, so, if we

allow it, when we come out of lockdown, the Holy Spirit will enable us to get on with our God-given task of living and spreading the good news of what God has done for us and what he wants of us to West Wickham, Beckenham, Bromley and Kent, offering people the opportunity to hear and learn more about the faith which means so much to us.

So excited were those first disciples at what was happening to them that Pentecost that passersby wondered if they were drunk. Wouldn't it be great, if we were so excited about our faith and so energetic in living it out that those we met wondered what it was that we'd got and wanted some of it too.

Amen.

Hymn of response – Father we love you.

A recording with lyrics can be found using the following link (but you may need to skip the advert first). <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=we2o04WzRAA>

Prayer Pointers

For a fresh outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the church and especially on our two congregations of St Mary and St Francis. When we return to our buildings may we be energised and infused with the Spirit to bring more people to faith in Christ and serve your community here in West Wickham.

Continue to pray for our Government and that MP's, ministers and officials may have integrity, truthfulness and honesty in all that they do. We pray for all scientists and doctors who are advising the Government on how to deal with Covid19. May their advice be acted upon and subsequent decisions be wise.

For all those who are physically separated from their families as a result of the Covid19 lockdown especially those who cannot meet their children or grandchildren and long for a hug and embrace. May they keep hope in this period of waiting and may their longing be satisfied.

For all those who have been bereaved during this crisis and who have been unable to say goodbye to members of their families or friends. May they be comforted by the Holy Spirit and find solace in the outstretched arms of Jesus.

Ever-present God, be with us in our isolation, be close to us in our distancing, be healing in our sickness, be joy in our sadness, be light in our darkness, be wisdom in our confusion, be all that is familiar when all is unfamiliar, that when the doors reopen we may with the zeal of Pentecost inhabit our communities and speak of your goodness to an emerging world.

(Prayer by Andrew Nunn – Dean of Southwark Cathedral)

Closing Prayer:

Faithful God, who fulfilled the promises of Easter by sending us your Holy Spirit and opening to every race and nation the way of life eternal:

Open our lips by your Spirit, that every tongue may tell of your glory;
through Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen