

Sunday Morning Resources

Sunday 23 May 2021 - Pentecost

Lectionary Readings (depending on the kind of service you are leading, you may use one or more of the following readings – however, you **must** use the **reading from Acts**, as this is what the homily is based on, and the lectionary states that it must be either the first or second reading).

Acts 2.1-21; Psalm 104.26-36, 37b; Romans 8.22-27; John 15.26-27, 16.4b-15

You are unlikely to use all the readings, but it's well worth reading them through in preparation. Revd Dr Jenny Gage has provided a few notes to give context to them individually and as a set. These notes can be found at the end of this resource.

Homily

Today's homily has been written by the Revd Dr Jenny Gage, Minister for Social Justice at Ely Cathedral and Bishop's Officer for Self-supporting Ministry

Anyone who has heard Martin Luther King proclaiming 'I have a dream' knows the power of a good sermon or speech. He delivered that speech at the Lincoln Memorial, as a homage to Abraham Lincoln whose powerful Gettysburg Address marked the start of the emancipation of slaves in America.

Both speeches transformed American society, and they are remembered long after they were delivered because of the impact they had. There is some disagreement about some of the precise details in both cases – those listening didn't immediately realise that they were hearing history being made – but no disagreement that they were transformative.

2020, and now 2021 as well, will go down in the history books because of worldwide disruption. We don't yet know if we're over the worst, or whether there is yet more to come. But however appealing getting back to where we were before might be, however much it might appear that things are going back to normal, things won't be the same again.

There are times in history when nothing much happens, life goes on in the same way, and then there are time when everything changes. That's the kind of thing that Luke is reporting for us – an event after which nothing will ever be the same again.

Like the early church, we are living through such a time.

For them, the cause was the death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ. Some Jewish people, perhaps a few Gentiles as well, had got to know him, and hoped that he might be the Messiah they longed for – someone who would fulfil the promises they believed God had made to their ancestors, who would turn things around for them.

Then he was executed by the Romans. It looked as if everything they had hoped for had died with him. Except it seemed that he wasn't dead. He appeared to his closest friends. They were convinced that he had risen from the dead. He told them he couldn't stay with them,

that he would be returning to his Father, but the Father would send them a Comforter in his place.

So they waited, prayerfully, to see what would happen. The Spirit came to them in wind and in fire. It was, Peter told the crowds, what God had promised through the prophets – that he would pour out his Spirit, and people would prophesy, see visions, dream dreams.

Like those first apostles, some people now experience quite dramatic evidence of the Holy Spirit at work in them. For others, there is nothing so obvious.

‘Come, Holy Ghost, our souls inspire’ is a hymn to the Holy Spirit, written in the 9th century. It is sung at ordination services and also in coronation services. It talks of the sevenfold gifts that the Spirit will impart. These gifts of the Spirit are described in Isaiah chapter 11 – wisdom, understanding, counsel, fortitude, knowledge, piety and the fear of the Lord. It is the evidence of these gifts that marks someone out as being filled with the Holy Spirit, not the presence or otherwise of dramatic signs.

As the disciples waited and prayed, the Holy Spirit worked in them, giving them the gifts that they would need for the work that lay ahead of them. They couldn’t possibly have started what they did in their own strength!

The gift of the Holy Spirit is not just for a chosen few, not just for those who are ordained ministers, or who are evangelists. The Holy Spirit works in everyone who is willing to be called into service. All of us here today are called to service.

You, each one of you, is being called to service by the Holy Spirit, and has been given all that you need to get on with it. As new gifts are required, so they will be developed in you. Just trust the Holy Spirit, and don’t get in its way!

All of us have the potential to be a blessing to others, no matter how old or young we are, no matter how well-educated or not, no matter how busy we are. We just have to open our hearts to let the Holy Spirit work in us, and to be prepared to see what needs to be done that we could do.

Our world is very needy. It needs people like you and me to work in it, to serve others, to be a blessing because the light of Christ is shining in us.

At the end of church services, the dismissal ‘Go in peace to love and serve the Lord’ is often used. That’s because we should leave this service, and every service, knowing that we are going out to love and serve the Lord. Not in our own strength, but empowered by the Holy Spirit who is at work in us.

Amen

Suggested intercessions

Holy Spirit,

who came to the disciples in wind and fire,
empowering, transforming,
creating people who changed the world –
do your work in us.

As we come to you in prayer for all in need,
empower us to be part of the answer to their need,
empower us to be a blessing to all whom we meet.

We pray for all who long for change:

for all who are poor and hungry,
for the homeless, for refugees,
for people who have lost their livelihoods,
for young people who feel that their futures have been taken from them.

Be with them in their need,

help them to keep alive their hopes and their dreams
for a better future.

Help them to find new beginnings,
opportunities to start afresh.

Lord, in your mercy

Hear our prayer.

We pray for all who long for change:

for all who live in homes that are not safe,
for those in relationships that are violent or coercive,
for families where parents and children find it hard to understand each other,
for communities split by prejudice and intolerance,
for people who live with oppression or war ...

[add particular places or communities].

Be with them in their need,

help them to keep alive their hopes and their dreams
for a better future.

Help them to find new beginnings,
opportunities to start afresh.

Lord, in your mercy

Hear our prayer.

We pray for all who feel that they have seen quite enough change:

for those who dread another day that may bring new threats,
for all who feel that all that is good in their lives has been lost,
for all who fear the future.

Be with them in their need,

help them to keep alive their hopes and their dreams
for a better future.

Help them to find new beginnings,
opportunities to start afresh.

Lord, in your mercy

Hear our prayer.

We pray for all in particular need at this time,
for all who are ill or distressed,
for all whose load feels too heavy to bear.
From our own community, we pray for ...

We pray too for all whose lives are coming to an end,
and especially for those who will die alone, or feeling unloved.
Among the recently departed, we remember ...
and pray for those who mourn for them.

Lord, in your mercy

Hear our prayer.

Holy Spirit,

you changed the lives of the apostles,
you have changed the lives of so many people across the ages,
empowering them with your fire.

Come now and change us,
empower us with your fire,
make us a blessing to those around us,
a comfort to those who need comfort,
and a witness to the power of God to make all things new.

As you came at Pentecost,
renew your church,
give it energy and power from on high
to do your work in this place at this time.

Merciful Father,

**accept these prayers for the sake of your Son, our Saviour, Jesus Christ.
Amen.**

Suggested hymns/songs

We can't sing at present, so I'd suggest going to the A Church Near You website and downloading whatever they have for this week.

Alternatively, these might help to inspire you:

- Come Holy Ghost, Our Souls Inspire <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WjKcc8lcxlo>
- Build Your Kingdom <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bHTxdjt8qlA>
- Make me a Channel of Your Peace <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RNagMjn1zXg>
- Go Forth and Tell <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XNyDd9qtuk0>
- Breathe on me, breath of God <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a9s8BFHThfc>

Notes on the readings

Psalm 104.26-36, 37b

In this psalm, the psalmist praises God for all that he has done in creation, and for providing for all his creatures. One way of looking at it is that it is a poetic version of Genesis 1. The world in all its complexity and diversity is the work of the Lord, and the appropriate human response is to praise God for it. All life is dependent on God for existing in the first place, and for flourishing. This psalm was used on Pentecost from the earliest Christian times. The connection is God's breath, which animates all creation. The word used for breath is the same word that is used for Spirit. Just as all creation is dependent on God for physical breath and nourishment, so too all creation depends on God for spiritual life and nourishment.

Romans 8.22-27

In Genesis 3, we read how Adam and Eve were expelled from the Garden of Eden, and how God cursed the earth, so that it brought forth thorns and thistles and needed to be toiled over to produce food. Creation itself suffered for the sin of Adam. Here, St Paul describes how this will be put right. Creation will be transformed, including human nature. In this passage, we read of God's promise that all creation will be restored to what it was meant to be. We can put faith in this because we already have a foretaste of the work of the Holy Spirit, who mediates this transformation. Because we, and all creation, are in God's hands, we can have faith that in the end all will be well.

John 15.26-27, 16.4b-15

The Holy Spirit, who will come to those who follow Jesus once Jesus is no longer with them, comes to help everyone understand the situation regarding sin, righteousness and judgement. The sin referred to here is the sin of refusing to believe in Jesus – righteousness is believing in him, and judgement will follow lack of belief. Through the Holy Spirit, the disciples will be guided into all truth, and will come to know God in a new way because Father and Son are one, and through the Son, the disciples will be brought into the fullness of the revelation of God. This is another way of describing the transformation that occurs through the action of the Holy Spirit as a consequence of what Jesus did through his death and resurrection.

Acts 2.1-21

Following the ascension, the disciples were still waiting and praying. With the coming of the Holy Spirit, all that is changed – and the church is born! The power of God, seen in the resurrection and ascension, now falls on the people of God. These should not be seen as separate events, but as three ways in which God's glory is revealed, and his power made known. As the post-communion prayer for this Sunday puts it: "Almighty and ever-living God, you fulfilled the Easter promise by sending us your Holy Spirit."

"When the day of Pentecost had come" doesn't quite do justice to the Greek, which carries the sense of the time being fulfilled – this is a *kairos* moment. This is the day on which God's promise to send the Spirit (as in the gospel reading) is fulfilled. Throughout Acts, and elsewhere in the Bible, the coming of the Spirit is associated with fulfilment – all lack and emptiness has been filled.

God's Spirit is acting as it did in creation, bringing something new into being – the new creation. This new creation is so disturbing that some try to explain it away – "they are filled with new wine", while others simply try to make some sense of it – "what does this mean?". A few weeks previously, Peter had been so frightened that he denied that he'd ever known Jesus; now he leads the disciples

in explaining what has happened to them. The miracle on display is that those who were frightened and silenced now proclaim the gospel with great power. This is not simply an interior empowerment of the disciples, but an empowering which sets in motion something which is still going on now, 2000 years later.

The age of fulfilment of God's promises is come, the kingdom of God is here. This is the good news of the gospel which has not been silenced from that day to this.