

31 May 2020

# Wind, fire..... **Word**



Welcome to worship on this Pentecost Sunday. Instead of gathering at Bournville URC for joint pastorate worship today, we are at home, physically distanced but together in the Spirit.

**Prayer:** Living God, you sent the Holy Spirit to breathe life into your church. Let us no longer be captives to fear, but messengers of your saving love, so that all may be reconciled in you; through Jesus Christ, our peace. Amen

**Hymn:** There's a spirit in the air,

**Readings** 1 Kings 19:11-12 ; Acts 2 1-4

## **Reflection**

John 1.1 *In the beginning, the Word already was.* Wind and fire, but no earthquake—surely the writer of Acts and his informants remembered the story of Elijah, hiding in a cave, when they tried to make sense of that stupefying Pentecost and its astonishing outcome.

How do you represent the Spirit? How do you show the disciples being filled with the Holy Spirit?

There's a wide choice of art for Pentecost: some showing literal flames standing over the disciples' heads as though they were candles: more abstract depictions often incorporating a dove, often a dove of fire, some trying to indicate wind. The Weoley Hill Pentecost banner incorporates dove and fire.

It's harder to represent wind than fire, of course, and we can only guess what it all sounded like. I sometimes think it must have been like standing in the middle of a fireworks display—not so much the bangs, but the amazing, exciting lights and whizzing sounds—but no, not a whizzing sound, more of a roaring storm wind. Or perhaps it was simply frightening, like a lightning storm right over their heads.

As I am essentially a word person, and since the lectionary text for today includes part of Peter's great sermon, what speaks to me in all of this is

the voice, the Word: the still small voice or murmur or whisper that told Elijah that God was present, sending him out of his cave to listen and back to the dangerous politics of Ahab's court; the Spirit speaking through the disciples, so that everyone heard them in their own languages. Aside from the people who dismissed them as being drunk and unintelligible country hicks, of course. (I wonder, were Galilean accents then mocked like Brummie ones now?) The Spirit empowering them to witness, to heal and to preach.

**Reading:** Acts 2, 5-13

And then Peter, loudmouth, unreliable Peter, stands up and uses his big outdoor voice meant for shouting over the noises of ship and storm to speak the Word given him by the Spirit.

**Reading** Acts 2.14-21

Chinese:

அப்பொழுது கர்த்தருடைய நாமத்தைத்  
தொழுதுகொள்ளுகிறவனெவனோ அவன்  
இரட்சிக்கப்படுவான் என்று தேவன் உரைத்திருக்கிறார். Tamil

Hapo, yeyote atakayeomba kwa jina  
la Bwana, ataokolewa. Swahili

И будет: всякий, кто призовет имя Господне,  
спасется. Russian

Era buli alisaba  
erinya lya Mukama  
alirokoka. Luganda

Et quiconque invoquera le nom  
du Seigneur sera sauvé. French

I e ora ei tur hende ku invoke number  
di Señor lo keda salbá. Papiamentu

සමීදාණන් වහන්සේගේ නාමය කියා අයදින කවුරු නමුත්  
ගළුවනු ලබන්නෝ ය.' Sinhalese

En het zal zijn, dat al wie de naam des Heren  
aanroept, behouden zal worden. Dutch

到  
那  
時  
候  
凡  
求  
告  
主  
名  
的  
就  
必  
得  
救

Jeder, der dann den Namen des Herrn anruft, wird gerettet werden. German

***Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.***

There is no language requirement, no colour bar, no ethnicity test, no class barrier, no passports or visas needed, no entry fee, no 'men only' signs, no points system.

Now, we can easily portray candle flames over heads, or doves made of fire. We can debate whether the 'tongues' were glossolalia, whether the disciples miraculously spoke different languages or if they were understood in different languages. None of this matters so much as the effect of the Word brought by the Spirit:

- The thousands who heard the Word and were baptised.
- The growing understanding of the Word among the disciples as they worked out how to live in the resurrection and in the Spirit
  - not without difficulty and hitches along the way. Gentiles? *Gentiles!?! Who receives charity? How do we organise?*
- and as they took the Word far beyond the borders of Roman Judea. It's *The Acts of the Apostles* for a reason.

Did you learn Christina Rossetti's poem, *Who has seen the wind*, at school?

The second stanza goes:

*Who has seen the wind?*

*Neither you nor I:*

*But when the trees bow down their heads,*

*The wind is passing by.*



Like seeing the wind, we don't—at least I don't—actually see the Spirit in a physical sense. It's a fire warming our hearts, an earthquake turning our world upside down, a wind that stirs and bends us, a dove murmuring in our thoughts—no metaphor can ever be adequate. But the Spirit still speaks the Word of God in the world and in us if we can hear it. And if we do, we will see the results, in our own lives and in the lives of people around us.

We are physically apart, but one in the Spirit. We have been kept from family, friends and community, but they remain in our hearts. We can't meet to worship, but we can join in prayer. We are uncertain about the future, but we can prayerfully consider how the Spirit might lead us in new directions after this enforced halt.

**Prayer:** Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on us. Open our hearts and our minds to the Word that was in the beginning, the Word that inspired the disciples.



We pray, in this time of pandemic, for everyone who is ill, everyone who is fearful for themselves or others, everyone isolated, everyone struggling at home with work and family. We give thanks and pray for everyone who is still at work or returning to a workplace: health workers of all kinds, teachers, transport workers, retail workers, delivery drivers, carers, rubbish collectors and many more.

We give thanks and pray for scientists, doctors, researchers and specialists, as they search for tests, vaccines, and better treatments. We pray for people in positions of authority to act wisely and selflessly in formulating policies.

We pray for the people of the world who endure poverty, homelessness, oppression or violence as well as the threat of disease.

We pray for our families, friends and neighbours, especially remembering those who are ill or waiting for delayed treatment, for those who have been bereaved, those who have lost jobs or income or had important life events cancelled or postponed. We pray for our youngsters and for all young people.

We pray that Your Holy Spirit will bring comfort and courage, with strength to carry on. Teach us and guide us in the way of the Spirit, so that we are messengers and comforters to the people around us and to the world at large.

And we pray as our Saviour taught us: *Our father....*

**Hymn:** Come down, O Love divine;

Credits: Opening prayer, *Office of Theology and Worship, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)*. And thanks to Leonora and Kumaran Tambyraja for helping with translations.