



READINGS AND REFLECTION FOR THE FEAST OF PENTECOST
SUNDAY 31 MAY 2020

This weekend the Collect is on the Loop

Psalm 104

26 O Lord, how manifold are your works! ♦
In wisdom you have made them all;
the earth is full of your creatures.
27 There is the sea, spread far and wide, ♦
and there move creatures beyond number, both small and great.
28 There go the ships, and there is that Leviathan ♦
which you have made to play in the deep.
29 All of these look to you ♦
to give them their food in due season.
30 When you give it them, they gather it; ♦
you open your hand and they are filled with good.
31 When you hide your face they are troubled; ♦
when you take away their breath,
they die and return again to the dust.
32 When you send forth your spirit, they are created, ♦
and you renew the face of the earth.
33 May the glory of the Lord endure for ever; ♦
may the Lord rejoice in his works;
34 He looks on the earth and it trembles; ♦
he touches the mountains and they smoke.
35 I will sing to the Lord as long as I live; ♦
I will make music to my God while I have my being.
36 So shall my song please him ♦
while I rejoice in the Lord.
3[7 Let sinners be consumed out of the earth
and the wicked be no more. ♦]
Bless the Lord, O my soul.
Alleluia!

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Acts 2.1-21

1 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.'

John 7.37-39

37 On the last day of the festival, the great day, while Jesus was standing there, he cried out, "Let anyone who is thirsty come to me, 38 and let the one who believes in me drink. As the scripture has said, "Out of the believer's heart shall flow rivers of living water.' " 39 Now he said this about the Spirit, which believers in him were to receive; for as yet there was no Spirit, because Jesus was not yet glorified.

Reflection – This week Peter writes ...

Today is the day of the Holy Spirit, the day the Church was born, the day of Pentecost, fifty days after Jesus was raised from the dead by the Father. It is the day when, as the Acts of the Apostles records it, there was a tremendous coming together: disciples of Jesus were thought to be drunk because they were talking in strange

languages - but visitors from out of town could all understand them; there was, suddenly, a place for everyone. It is portrayed as the opposite of the experience in Genesis 11 where we read of the building of the city that became known as Babel. That project was about the consolidating of human power, achieving dominance - symbolised by the ability to communicate easily in one language. Such arrogance was, we read, stopped by Yahweh, the God of Israel. The Lord said, "Look, they are one people, and they have all one language: and this is only the beginning of what they will do; nothing that they propose will now be impossible for them. Come, let us go down, and confuse their language there, so that they will not understand one another's speech." (Gen 11.7)

This dramatic episode is not important for what it tells us about God, but for what it tells us about ourselves. As human beings we are always striving for control, for independence, - and we are always being frustrated, not least by the difficulties of communication. The difficulty of getting along with everyone else encourages us just to get on with our own thing: 'live, and let live,' we say. 'You do your thing, I'll do mine.' And we think, if only China would let Hong Kong do just that - but that is to overlook the way that such independence for Hong Kong is, rightly or wrongly, threatening to China. On the other hand, many are alarmed at the increasing tendency for the US to pull out of agreements and go it alone. And the Dominic Cummings episode was distressing not least because of this: the way in which he presented his actions and choices as self-contained. They were precisely what he had decided. He didn't need to take anyone or anything else, beyond his family, into account.

Pentecost is utterly different. Our most precious treasure as Christians is the experience of God as Father, Son and Spirit: God is not remote, but involved, understanding, loving - not just in a gracious 'from up there' kind of way, but in the dynamic relations of Father, Son and Spirit in unceasing conversation. Pentecost is God's including us in this most intimate, eternal conversation. It is God's giving of Godself - portrayed in the Acts of the Apostles as a moment of great drama, rushing wind and tongues of fire, but in the Gospel of John that we have just heard, with extraordinary intimacy: Jesus, together with his disciples, breathes on them (would you really want even your best friend breathing on you?) and saying, Peace be with you! Receive the Holy Spirit... And what is the gift but that joining of everyone and everything together in love and joy and peace; joined in a way that can never be taken away. Hints of this have been evident in these past weeks as we have found ourselves exchanging greetings with people we may have passed before but never spoken to, a little stirring of the possibilities of connection and belonging. But this gift is not something we can manufacture. It is God's gift, the gift of the 'go-between' God as a great bishop once called the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is for everyone - differently given to everyone, but the same in drawing us into love and joy and peace.

Peter cr