

Pentecost. 23rd May 2021

The paper-version Service



To Begin: Find a Bible and a comfortable place. If safe, light a candle and read prayerfully through the service. If you have access to worship music, choose a song and listen to it as you begin or read, or even sing, the song from this Sunday's Service set out below.

Opening Prayer: Almighty and Holy God, we cannot hope to know you, but through Jesus and the Holy Spirit, you make yourself known to us and invite us into relationship. Thank you that you offer us forgiveness, healing, transformation, and a fresh start. Thank you that you offer us yourself in your Spirit; help us to receive your gift and walk forwards in your light, reflecting your glory in the world. **Amen**



Song:

Holy Spirit, living breath of God,
Breathe new life into my willing soul.
Bring the presence of the risen Lord,
To renew my heart and make me whole.

Cause Your Word to come alive in me;

Give me faith for what I cannot see,
Give me passion for Your purity;
Holy Spirit, breathe new life in me.

Holy Spirit, come abide within,
May Your joy be seen in all I do.
Love enough to cover every sin,
In each thought and deed and attitude.

Kindness to the greatest and the least,

Gentleness that sows the path of peace.

Turn my strivings into works of grace;
Breath of God show Christ in all I do.

Holy Spirit, from creation's birth,
Giving life to all that God has made,
Show Your power once again on earth,
Cause Your church to hunger for your ways.

Let the fragrance of our prayers arise;

Lead us on the road of sacrifice,
That in unity the face of Christ
Will be clear for all the world to see.

Read: John 3:1-21.

God offers a new beginning. A summary of the talk given by Howard Wright.

In our story Jesus has just turned water into wine and cleared the temple. John now moves to a night-time encounter with a curious member of the Jewish leadership.

In turning water to wine Jesus signals that he is bringing in a new whole new engagement with life and God, and this is reinforced by his claim upon the temple and subsequent pointing to himself as the new way to encounter God.

Now in Jesus' conversation with Nicodemus he stresses the new connection with God, through him and by his Spirit.

The Old Testament prophets had foretold this. Read Ezekiel 36:24-28.

Nicodemus would have heard of, or even witnessed the clearing of the temple. Nicodemus seems a genuine enquirer and he begins with a warm greeting. He may have come with an offer to Jesus to join the club – come and be one of us – one of the leaders of God's people.

Jesus sees his heart and challenges him. *'Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again.'*

Jesus already belongs to the 'club', the Kingdom of God, and declares that access is through water, that is,

baptism as practiced by John the Baptist, and by the Spirit, as foretold by John. (See John 1:32-34)

Nicodemus, is confused, 'How can someone be born when they are old?

Nicodemus was born into the people of God. He had the advantage in his culture of being born male and probably had a good family backing – this was a privilege, but also his right. And he worked hard and played his part to be a respected, and rightly revered, perhaps even feared as a leader.

Nicodemus didn't need any better start. Others might, but such a thing was impossible – you could convert to Judaism, but you could never achieve the height of being a genuine Jewish male, an honoured member of God's chosen people.

As I read this, I see a smile on Jesus' face. He is gently teasing Nicodemus, this is a serious matter, but he knows Nicodemus wants to know, but can't quite get it yet – it's a great example of that truth and grace combination. Sharing the truth but with kindness.

So, Jesus continues, *'The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit.'* (:8)

This is not just for Jewish males of a certain class, this is for men and for women, and for all tribes and races – for **all!**



This is staggering for Nicodemus – ‘How can this be?’ (:9)

Sadly, this is staggering for us. Perhaps for ourselves. ‘How can it be that God should love someone like me?’ Even more sadly, we may find ourselves asking, how can God love someone like that!

John comments on this at the end of this conversation with the famous words in verse 16. The ‘whoever’ in this verse includes you, me, and anyone else, who will look to Jesus and believe.

We are all invited. The baptism of water, cleansing our past, and the filling of the Spirit, bringing joy and new life. This is a wonderful new beginning/new creation/new birth.

This is like the taking of water (repentance and ceremonial washing) and adding the flavour and joy of wine. It’s the cleansing of the temple story outworked in us, with the introduction to Jesus as the new place of encounter with God. We, indwelt by the renewing Spirit, become the dwelling place of God.

This is truly a new Testament (Covenant) – the Old is passing and the new is coming. No wonder Nicodemus found it hard to grasp.

No more restrictions on access to people of any kind. This Spirit is available anytime, anywhere. And it’s all made possible through Jesus.

Jesus uses an Old Testament story to highlight this. All who looked on the bronze snake were saved from the otherwise deadly venom inflicted by the plague of snakes in the Israelite camp. So, the Son of Man must be lifted-up – all who look to Jesus and believe will be saved, healed, and restored to the eternal Kingdom of God.

God’s love is accessible to us – just look. Look to him. Ask him now to be part of your life. Invite him to heal you and fill you with his Spirit.

Even when there are past failures and fixed habits God can provide the new start – both a one-off moment and daily need. We are encouraged to ‘...go on being filled with the Holy Spirit.’ (Ephesians 5:18)

Nicodemus is changed. As best we can know, he looks to Jesus. He continues to risk his natural birth reputation, he stands up for a fair hearing for Jesus against his colleagues and, takes care of Jesus’ body following the crucifixion. Will we be changed?

Prayers: Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. (Philippians 4:4-6)

- Pray for this day, and the coming week.
- Pray for justice, mercy, peace, and hope.
- Pray for individuals, for neighbours, for family and friends.
- Pray for the Church.



Collect: Pentecost. God, who as at this time taught the hearts of your faithful people by sending to them the light of your Holy Spirit: grant us by the same Spirit to have a right judgement in all things and evermore to rejoice in his holy comfort; through the merits of Christ Jesus our Saviour, who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever.. **Amen.**



The Lord's Prayer: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours now and for ever. **Amen.**

Blessing: Pentecost: The Spirit of truth lead us into all truth, give us grace to confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, and strengthen us to proclaim the word and works of God; and the blessing of God almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, be among us and remain with us always. **Amen.**

The Notices: We are now holding ticketed and socially distanced services in the building on Sundays at 9.30am. Further information on our website or by ringing our vicar, Howard.

If you know of others who would like to receive this, or you would rather not receive it; or if you find yourself isolated and not able to get neighbours, friends, or family to help, then ring Howard, 01420 563344.

