

Day of Pentecost – Year B

Sunday 19 May 2024

The Faith Action Programme would like to thank Rev Dr Shaw Paterson, Moderator Designate of the General Assembly, for his thoughts on the Day of Pentecost.

Weekly Worship, based on the Revised Common Lectionary, is for everyone – in any capacity – who is involved in creating and leading worship.

It provides liturgical material that can be used for worship in all settings. Our writers are asked to share their approaches to creating and delivering this material to equip leaders with a greater confidence and ability to reflect on their own worship practice and experience and encourage them to consider how this material might be adapted for their own context.

We would encourage continual reflection on the changing patterns of worship and spiritual practice that are emerging from disruption and how this might help identify pathways towards development and worship renewal.

An archive of resources for daily worship can be found on the Sanctuary First website:
<https://www.sanctuaryfirst.org.uk/daily-worship>

We may not all be gathered in the same building, but at this time, when we need each other so much, we are invited to worship together, from where we are – knowing that God can hear us all and can blend even distant voices into one song of worship.

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Introduction

Today is Pentecost Sunday, and we take ourselves back to biblical times and try to capture the emotions of the disciples, of those who were following, of those who were listening. They had heard the crowds shout, “Crucify him!”, they had watched Jesus suffer and die, they had been in despair and then they experienced the joy of the resurrection. The day of ascension must have been wondrous and sad. Seeing Christ disappear from sight and in His place there’s another promise – God’s Spirit will come. And they waited. For ten days they waited and all of a sudden God’s Spirit not only came upon them but moved from within them.

As I prepare for the General Assembly, I am acutely aware of the difficulties and challenges facing the Church. I am also aware of the need to build together (my theme for the year) on the foundations laid by Christ. It is tempting to read about the Pentecost and pray that the Holy Spirit would come upon the Church to help us grow ... but the Spirit is already with us.

When the Holy Spirit entered the disciples, other people heard and they saw – they saw how the disciples behaved; they saw how the members of the early Church cared for one another; how they looked after the poor and needy. And so as we talk about Christ, as we profess Christ, it’s about more than just using the right words. It’s about following Christ. Pentecost is not passive, it’s active. We cannot sit back and wait for the Holy Spirit to be active in the Church ... the Spirit is already active in the Church. On the day of Pentecost the disciples were “all” filled with the Holy Spirit and they began to talk as the Spirit enabled them to speak. At Pentecost we have a wonderful opportunity to examine how God might want to use us and how the Spirit might enable us.

[Acts 2:1-21](#)

In John’s Gospel (20:22), Jesus “... breathed on them and said ‘Receive the Holy Spirit.’” Here in Acts, the Spirit descends upon the disciples on the day of Pentecost. However, both accounts follow the resurrection and refer to the disciples as having a new inward power that quite literally transformed them. No longer were they the disciples hiding in an upper room, now they become bold, they speak out with a new authority. Now they are ready to fulfil the great Commission from Matthew’s Gospel.

Pentecost means ‘The Fiftieth’ and/or ‘The Feast of Weeks’ as it fell on the fiftieth day, a ‘week of weeks’ after the Passover. Pentecost was one of three major festivals that Jews were legally bound to attend, the others being Passover and the Feast of Tabernacles.

The followers of Christ were gathered together and were blessed by the Holy Spirit. This enabled them to be heard in other languages, which brought amazement and wonder to the gathered crowds. This was followed by Peter's sermon, where he extolled Jesus as the promised Messiah, as evidenced in the resurrection. However, before doing so, Peter links what his hearers have just witnessed at Pentecost by presenting evidence that this was prophesied in scripture, and to a Jewish audience this would have been sufficient reason for believing in its truth and divine significance. Joel spoke about God pouring out the Spirit on those who would proclaim God's message.

Psalm 104:24-34, 35b

This is a psalm in praise of the Creator. Verse 1 is not only a psalm of praise of the Creator but one that reflects an awareness of ecology. As we rejoice in God's works so we are to sing to God's glory.

Verses 24-26 highlight the creatures of the ocean, including Leviathan, the sea monster which is demythologised as a creature made to amuse God.

Verses 27-30 speak of the dependence of those creatures on God's provision. Here we are reminded of God's breath or Spirit giving new life to the earth.

Verses 31-34 emphasise the Psalmist's thoughts that the earth is not just at our disposal, but also gives God great pleasure. Furthermore, our singing praises to God for the wonders of creation brings us happiness.

Romans 8:22-27

Here Paul refers back to creation and human nature, and about the need to be set free from its slavery to decay and share in the glorious freedom of the children of God. The hymn, 'Abide With Me' comes to mind; in verse two we sing: *Change and decay in all around I see; O Thou who changest not, abide with me.*

"For I am convinced that the suffering we now endure bear no comparison with the glory that awaits"... (Rom 8:18). These words from the verses preceding our reading today, are often quoted within a funeral service. However, they deserve to be heard more than just at a time of grief. Much can be made of the theological language used by Paul, yet for Pentecost Sunday a focus on the Spirit and the Spirit's role within our lives deserves particular attention. In verse 22 Paul speaks of creation groaning, then in verse 23 it is 'we'

who are groaning. Finally in verse 26, it is the Spirit who groans on our behalf. We live in difficult times where the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We must trust ourselves to the Spirit.

[John 15:26-27; 16:4b-15](#)

It's tempting to simply glance over the gospel passage for today and focus on the reading from Acts. However, in John's Gospel we have in Jesus' own words the promise that He would send "the Helper... the Spirit" (v26). The disciples had been told that the Spirit would come, but much like they were told about the future arrest of Jesus, His death and resurrection, we can only speculate how this resonated with them. It is one thing being told, quite another to listen and understand what is being said.

Jesus reveals to the disciples that life will not be easy. Having faith would not make them immune to criticism but they are to know that the Spirit will speak the truth.

Remember too that this passage takes place before the cross and empty tomb, before the death and resurrection of Christ. It will only be after the ascension and after the Spirit comes that the disciples can truly hear and understand what Jesus is saying to them. Paul speaks similarly in 1 Corinthians 13, in referring to seeing a dim image in a mirror and compares it to the complete knowledge that is to come. Before the cross, before the empty tomb, before Jesus' glorification, there is just no way for His followers to follow Him fully. It is only after Jesus has departed, and after "the Spirit of truth comes" that the disciples can hear and understand what they cannot yet know.

Sermon ideas

Pentecost is such a significant event that it is tempting to preach on the coming of the Holy Spirit, the effect that had on the disciples and/or Peter's sermon, which led to some 3,000 converts. However, it is worth considering taking a slightly different approach.

- Use silence. Silence is powerful, particularly when it is contrasted with the noise of associated with that first Pentecost. It is easy to delve straight into the noise, the crowds and the busyness and associate it with the power of the Spirit. But reflecting with silence can often be more powerful than words.
- Read Acts 2: 1-21 from a dramatized Bible, with different voices representing Narrator, Person 1, Person 2, Peter and Joel.

- Read further (verses 22-35) to highlight the effect of the Spirit on Peter; his sermon in Acts 2, using two voices – those of Peter and David.
- Pentecost provides an ideal opportunity to connect with those from other countries and cultures. How can we ensure they hear and experience the word of God in their own language or in ways that they would understand? Reading the scripture (or different verses) in different languages may help to bring a sense of the multicultural dimension of Pentecost when so many heard the disciples speaking in their own languages. Identifying what customs/traditions are familiar to others and incorporating them into worship can help all of us in our understanding that we are all children of God.
- Another approach would be to think about the effect the Spirit had on the disciples, not just on Pentecost Sunday. Explore the ways the disciples changed: no longer cowering in locked rooms but speaking boldly; they professed Christ crucified and risen; they cared for one another, they loved another; they followed the example and commandment of Christ and loved their neighbour.
- Link in with the Moderatorial themes 'Ubuntu' and 'Build together'.

Ubuntu: 'I am because you are' or 'I am because we are.' We are created to be in community, to live and learn and love from and with each other. The disciples were changed but were still the same disciples, with the gift of the Holy Spirit enabling them to do great things. We too are enabled to do great things.

Build together: Together, working for the glory of God, the disciples were able to spread the Good News around the world. We are empowered by God's gift of the Spirit to build the Church of Jesus Christ.

Prayers

The Moderator and Moderator Designate have collaborated with the prayers for the seventh Sunday of Easter and Pentecost. Sally and Shaw hope that you might use/adapt these as suits your own setting.

Gathering prayer / Call to worship

God of the journey, Christ of the Way, Spirit who comforts and chides and challenges and moves us;

we work out how to walk Your path.

We gather as Your children, ready to listen and learn.

Speak into our today.

Let us worship, wonder and walk together.

Beloved, settle here and prepare to be unsettled.

Repetitive/Responsive prayer for use at different points throughout the service.

This prayer could work particularly well if spoken by different people in different languages each time it is used, or spoken by the congregation together. This would symbolise the oneness and togetherness of the children of God. The prayer could also be recorded in different languages in advance, if there are no different language speakers in your congregation. If you do not have anyone in the congregation who speaks another language why not involve the local school modern language department and ask if they would be willing to record the prayer which you can play during your service.

Keep us true to who we are.

Enable us to use the gifts you have given.

Bless us with Your Spirit, that we might build upon the foundations of Christ
as we seek to be Your Church at work in the world.

Prayer for renewal (based on CH4 595)

Each verse can be sung, followed by a moment of silence and reflection, before using the responsive prayer (as above).

Sing verse 1:

O Breath of life, come sweeping through us,
Revive your Church with life and power;
O Breath of life, come, cleanse, renew us,
and fit your Church to meet this hour.

[We hold a moment of silence to become more aware of God's presence]

Keep us true to who we are.

Enable us to use the gifts you have given.

Bless us with Your Spirit that we might build upon the foundations of Christ
as we seek to be Your church at work in the world.

Sing verse 2:

O Wind of God, come bend us, break us,
till humbly we confess our need;
then in your tenderness remake us,
revive, restore; for this we plead.

[In a moment of silence we confess our sin and seek God's tender mercy]

Keep us true to who we are.

Enable us to use the gifts you have given.

Bless us with Your Spirit that we might build upon the foundations of Christ
as we seek to be Your church at work in the world.

Sing verse 3:

O Breath of love, come breathe within us,
renewing thought and will and heart:
come, Love of Christ, afresh to win us,
revive your Church in every part.

*[We hold a moment of silence seek God's renewing Spirit in our lives, congregation and
community]*

Keep us true to who we are.

Enable us to use the gifts you have given.

Bless us with Your Spirit that we might build upon the foundations of Christ
as we seek to be Your church at work in the world.

Sing verse 4:

Revive us, Lord! is zeal abating
while harvest fields are vast and white?
Revive us, Lord, the world is waiting,
equip your Church to spread the light.

[We hold a moment of silence to consider our call to follow Jesus into a waiting world]

Keep us true to who we are.

Enable us to use the gifts you have given.

Bless us with Your Spirit that we might build upon the foundations of Christ
as we seek to be Your church at work in the world.

Blessing / Closing prayer

God of the journey, Christ of the Way, Spirit who comforts and chides and challenges and
moves us;

go with us as we walk Your path.

As we leave this place, pray we not leave You here.

Teach and talk to our every moment.
Speak into our today.
Settle in and unsettle us until Your will be done.
Amen

Musical suggestions

Our [online music resource](#) is on the Church of Scotland website; you can listen to samples of every song in the Church Hymnary 4th edition (CH4) and download a selection of recordings for use in worship. You will also find playlists for this week and liturgical seasons and themes on the *Weekly Worship* and *Inspire Me* tabs.

You can find further musical suggestions for this week in a range of styles on the [Songs for Sunday blog](#) from Trinity College Glasgow.

A suggested [playlist of songs from CH4 for Pentecost](#) can be found on the Church of Scotland website.

The following hymns are widely available online, but they are all now included in “God Welcomes All”, the new Hymnary Supplement to CH4 that is being launched at the General Assembly on 19 May 2024.

- “Vem, Espírito Santo (Come, Holy Spirit)” – (Louis Marcelo Illenseer)
- “Holy Spirit, Breath of Heaven” – (Geraldine Latty) CCLI song #4467366
- “As the wind song through the trees” – (Shirley Erena Murray) CCLI song #5327773
- “Holy Spirit, living breath of God” – (Getty) CCLI song #4779872
- “Come set your rule and reign” (Build your kingdom here) – (Rend Collective) CCLI song #6186078

Reflecting on our worship practice

Since the start of the pandemic in 2020, the way we worship has changed and we need to reflect on the changing or newly established patterns that emerged and continue to emerge as a result of the disruption.

We can facilitate worship for all by exploring imaginative approaches to inclusion, participation and our use of technologies in ways that suit our contexts. This is not an exhaustive list, but some things we could consider are:

- Framing various parts of the worship service in accessible language to help worshippers understand the character and purpose of each part. This is essential for creating worship for all (intergenerational worship) that reflects your community of faith.
- Holding spaces for reflection and encouraging prayer to be articulated in verbal and non-verbal ways, individually and in online breakout rooms.
- In online formats the effective use of the chat function and microphone settings encourages active participation in prayer, e.g. saying the Lord's Prayer together unmuted, in a moment of 'holy chaos'.
- If singing in our congregations is restricted, we can worship corporately by using antiphonal psalm readings, creeds and participative prayers.
- Using music and the arts as part of the worship encourages the use of imagination in place of sung or spoken words.
- Use of silence, sensory and kinaesthetic practices allow for experience and expression beyond regular audio and visual mediums.

The following questions might help you develop a habit of reflecting on how we create and deliver content and its effectiveness and impact, and then applying what we learn to develop our practice.

- How inclusive was the worship?
Could the worship delivery and content be described as worship for all/
intergenerational? Was it sensitive to different "Spiritual Styles"?
- How was the balance between passive and active participation?
- How were people empowered to connect with or encounter God?
What helped this? What hindered this?
- How cohesive was the worship?

Did it function well as a whole?

How effective was each of the individual elements in fulfilling its purpose?

- How balanced was the worship?
What themes/topics/doctrines/areas of Christian life were included?
- How did the worship connect with your context/contemporary issues?
Was it relevant in the everyday lives of those attending and in the wider parish/
community?
How well did the worship connect with local and national issues?
How well did the worship connect with world events/issues?
- What have I learned that can help me next time I plan and deliver worship?

Useful links

You can listen to samples of every song in the Church Hymnary 4th edition (CH4) and download a selection of recordings for use in worship [here](#)

You can find an introduction to spiritual styles online [here](#)

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