

## Pentecost Sunday of Easter 31<sup>st</sup> May 2020

This short act of worship has been prepared for you to use while we are unable to attend church. If you are well enough why not spend a few moments with God, knowing that other people are sharing this act of worship with you

### Opening Prayer

God of the universe, send your Holy Spirit to renew and refresh your world, that we, and creation in all its colour and all its diversity, may sing out your praise, and celebrate your presence among us. Send streams of living water where hearts are parched, and sprinkle showers of grace and peace in all places of conflict and need. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.

**Hymn:** Come down, O Love divine (StF 372)

*Sing, read or pray the words or listen here:*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zXO4rqBQOAU>

1 Come down, O Love divine,  
seek thou this soul of mine,  
and visit it with thine own ardour glowing;  
O Comforter, draw near,  
within my heart appear,  
and kindle it, thy holy flame bestowing.

2 O let it freely burn,  
till earthly passions turn  
to dust and ashes in its heat consuming;  
and let thy glorious light  
shine ever on my sight,  
and clothe me round, the while my path illuming.

3 Let holy charity  
mine outward vesture be,  
and lowliness become mine inner clothing:  
true lowliness of heart,  
which takes the humbler part,  
and o'er its own shortcomings weeps with loathing.

4 And so the yearning strong,  
with which the soul will long,  
shall far outpass the power of human telling;  
for none can guess its grace,  
till he become the place  
wherein the Holy Spirit makes his dwelling.

*Bianco da Siena d.1434; Tr: Richard Frederick Littledale 1833-90. CCLI 052772*

### Let us pray together

Shake us, Lord.

Shake us out of complacency.

Shake us out of fearfulness.

Shake us out of our comfort zone.

Shake us out of our church and into our world  
to speak out your word afresh.

Forgive us, loving God, when we have not listened to those blessed with your prophetic voice. Transform our fearfulness and stubbornness, and open our hearts to hear your words of encouragement and challenge. Give each of us gifts of discernment, faith and confidence, that your Church may be equipped with all it needs to reach those searching for acceptance, forgiveness, purpose and love. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.

**Today's Readings:** Acts 2.1-21, John 20: 19-23

### Time to Reflect

The birth of the church is a sign for the world that God's judgement and salvation are close. This is a birthday party I'm keen to participate in fully. Tongues of fire separated and rested on each believer. Fire is a symbol of God and of judgement. Yet here's God's gift of his Holy Spirit freely distributed to all. As

St Peter preaches, quoting the prophet Joel, God's Spirit is given regardless of status, age or gender. St Paul makes the same point in his letter to the church in Corinth: the same God activating different people with different abilities "for the common good". How important is that common good for our world today! Acting with our different gifts for justice and peace through Coronavirus crisis and climate crisis and the world's age-old trespasses of greed, discrimination and violence! Everybody is equally important and included in the birth of the church on planet earth. So today although we're not able to gather to celebrate, may we mark this day, not as a memorial but as a living continuation of God in human beings, a sign for the world of God's judgement against the ways people hurt each other and the offer of full salvation and forgiveness through Jesus Christ. Today, even more than in the past, God's Holy Spirit is activating the different gifts in each person, working together in various ways, to show that God is alive and working in the world to bring his Holy Kingdom to be.

In my old home town, the war memorial has a statue of the eternal flame. Such statues are quite common, and highly symbolic for veterans and the many who rightly gather there every November. It is part of a fitting memorial for those who gave their lives to save others. But for church, I am not looking for a statue, a memorial of times past. I need to experience the living flame, here and now and tomorrow too.

Fire is powerful, and dangerous. We remember with horror the fires of Australia and Grenfell. Fire is essential for humanity but needs to be carefully controlled and guarded. The Bible writers knew this, and they don't ally God with fire lightly. God is to be honoured as supreme in power and holiness, righteous and looking for righteousness in those who worship him. Yet St Peter points out that God is also our Saviour in Jesus Christ, saying "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved". When Christian people write about fire in poems and song, they are often inviting the fire of God into themselves and their communities. Bianco da Siena's poem, translated by Richard Littledale, says "O Comforter, draw near, within my heart appear, and kindle it, thy holy flame bestowing". Christian people sing it often as a prayer. So why do we invite such a dangerous thing into our lives? Simply because of the **effect** that God has within, because of the **change** that the Holy Spirit can make in a human life. As the hymn continues "let it freely burn, till earthly passions turn to dust and ashes, in its heat consuming". The fire of God is cleaning us up. Not an easy experience, yet one that is pleaded for in this prayerful hymn. And other songs too. One favourite by

Tim Hughes goes "There must be more than this, O breath of God, come breath within... Consuming fire, fan into flame a passion for Your name. Spirit of God fall in this place - Lord have Your way... with us." These words, as sung by many over the years, have seen changes in lives, and, in my case, not changes that were particularly sought for, but nevertheless changes brought God's Kingdom into play in my life.

The birth of the church is a sign for the world that God's judgement and salvation are close. This is a birthday party I'm keen to participate in fully. When I have been thinking about this Pentecost, an image came to me of a statue of a flame, like the one at that war memorial. I felt that it was warning me not to look for a memorial to the church, looking back, celebrating something in the past. Rather, I should want to experience the joy, and risk, of that first birthday, asking for God's consuming fire to visit again, and again, and for God to have his way, in my life, and the life of the church. This will have effects, it will mean change, and God's Kingdom coming into play. This is a risk, and may not be pleasant. But I don't want the statue, I want the living flame. What do you want?

#### Prayers

It's Pentecost and a big high five to all of you who have prayed for your five. In the notes for the "Thy Kingdom Come" campaign, it reads "to pray is to love. Don't bear your own burdens, or those of others, pray for them by loading them on to Jesus. Listen in to what he is already praying for." Keep going with those prayers, maybe on the fifth of each month?

Now what will we have to urge us to pray this week? Important in these times: a bar of soap, handwash and hand sanitizer. What do these have to do with Pentecost? It's because of qualities of the Holy Spirit:

- 1) **POWER:** These three give us the power to protect us from contagious disease;
- 2) **ENABLES:** Because we can wash our hands we're enabled to go out and work or shop or safely meet and then return home safely. We're enabled to open our post or shopping deliveries or receive treatment;
- 3) **COMFORTER:** Do you feel confident, a reassurance from handwashing? Does that fragrance or medical aroma make you feel that you have done the right thing?
- 4) **PERSONAL:** Our hands, cleansed and protected, are the agents of touch, meaning and understanding;
- 5) **CHANGING:** Your hands are changed, slightly different as a result of their washing;
- 6) **CLEANSING:** Your hands have a freshness and newness;
- 7) **UNIVERSAL:** As I watched a news report about volunteers pouring hand sanitiser into people's bottles in South Africa, I realised that it meant the same to them as it did to me.

There was much joy in our house when handwash became available again at our local pharmacy, and we received a free hand sanitiser with an order! Whoop!

So, when you are washing your hands and timing it by singing happy birthday twice or saying the Lord's Prayer, reflect on the amazing work of the Holy Spirit in your life and sing God's praises.

In our prayers, when I say "Spirit of the living God" please respond "fall afresh on us". Let us pray, using the letters of SPIRIT:

**S) Suffer :** We pray for those suffering from effects of the Coronavirus disease, from bereavement, anxiety, fear and from illnesses where treatment is delayed.

Spirit of the living God, **fall afresh on us.**

**P) Power :** We pray for the powerful in leadership. Give them hearts for just and fair decisions which are good for all. Also for wisdom for faith leaders. Spirit of the living God, **fall afresh on us.**

**I) Inspire:** We pray for people who inspire us in their courage and good heartedness. May we be inspired in our Christian lives. Spirit of the living God, **fall afresh on us.**

**R) Risk takers:** We pray for those risking their health and lives for us: bus drivers, deliverers, post people, bin collectors, hospital cleaners, carers, shop staff, surgery staff, doctors, nursing staff, police and emergency services, council staff, newscasters, production teams, and many others. Spirit of the living God, **fall afresh on us.**

**I) Inclusion:** Help the whole world to include all, discriminate against no one, treat all with the grace you demonstrate through Pentecost, where all were able to understand in their own language. Spirit of the living God, **fall afresh on us.**

**T) Teachers:** We particularly pray for teachers, support staff, children and parents, making new changes and decisions this week. Give them wisdom and safety. Spirit of the living God, **fall afresh on us.**

**Amen.**

In silence, we bring before God those on our hearts.

**The Lord's Prayer.**

**Song:** Consuming Fire (Tim Hughes)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZCXh70eHSw4>  
Ending prayer

Dear Lord. Thank you for a good day, I hope others will have had as good a day as I have, especially the sick and the convalescent and their relatives and friends. May we all have received strength and knowledge from this day to face the coming days and nights.

**Amen.**

Blessing

May you see God's light on the path ahead  
When the road you walk is dark.

May you always hear, even in your hour of sorrow,  
The gentle singing of the lark.

When times are hard may hardness

Never turn your heart to stone,

May you always remember when the shadows fall  
You do not walk alone. **Amen.**