

Sunday 31st May 2020

This short act of worship has been prepared for you to use whilst we are unable to use Methodist Church premises. Spend a few moments with God, knowing that other people are sharing this act of worship with you. With thanks to Joyce Pegg, Nick White and the Connexional team.

Opening Prayer

Christ appears to His disciples saying, "peace be with you."

Holy Spirit, prepare my heart to know your peace afresh and to celebrate the Good News of God's Kingdom.

Hymn: Breathe on me breath of God (StF 370)

Sing/ Read /pray /proclaim the words or listen to it here

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a9s8BFHThfc>

Breathe on me, Breath of God
fill me with life anew,
that I may love what thou dost love,
and do what thou wouldst do.

Breathe on me, Breath of God,
until my heart is pure;
until with thee I will one will,
to do and to endure.

Breathe on me, Breath of God,
till I am wholly thine;
until this earthly part of me
glows with thy fire divine.

Breathe on me, Breath of God:
so shall I never die,
but live with thee the perfect life
of thine eternity.

Let us Pray

Amazing God
Today as we celebrate the coming of the Holy Spirit,
We join together through the love of Jesus.
With gratitude to offer our small gifts of worship
prayers and thoughts, music and songs, talking and
listening
Thankful for your presence in our lives and the gift of
each day.
Amen

Loving God

We admit we have hidden ourselves because we were afraid

We have been reluctant to listen and act
We have taken your world for granted and
undervalued its many gifts to us

We have selfishly kept your love and peace to
ourselves

And failed to tell everyone of your loving kindness.

We are sorry

Generous God as we call on your name, forgive us

Restored by forgiveness,

Pour out your living Spirit

Blow us in the right direction

Put a new and right spirit within us

Warm our hearts

So we are the spirited people you would have us be.

Amen

Today's Reading from the Acts of the Apostles Acts 2:1-21

Today's Gospel Reading: John 20:19-23

Time to Reflect

Today we celebrate Pentecost, the Jewish festival at which the Holy Spirit came. It was an event, which transformed the followers of Jesus, and gave life to the church.

It changed the lives of the first disciples forever. They were renewed and refreshed. They were empowered and enabled to do things they had never felt able to do before. The obvious immediate evidence was the speaking in tongues, and the tongues of fire. But the lasting change was how the disciples behaved afterwards as the gospel spread. They healed, they performed miracles, they told folk about Jesus, and the church grew.

Paul listed many gifts of the Spirit - wisdom, knowledge, faith, healing, miraculous powers,

prophecy, distinguishing between spirits, speaking in tongues, interpretation of tongues. And the metaphor, which Jesus used so powerfully and evocatively, was "living water". It was not the rushing wind that they heard, nor the tongues of fire, nor a dove of peace. Jesus' best description of the Holy Spirit, the one He used often was "living water".

When He took a detour, deliberately, through Samaria, and met the woman at the well, the woman on her sixth husband, He said, "The water from the well would not satisfy. Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but - and this is a very big but - but whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst". Not only that but He adds, "Indeed the water I give them will become a spring of water, welling up to eternal life".

This is a new kind of water, living, leaping water, welling up for all who receive the Spirit. But why did Jesus call the Spirit "living" water? He did, because all living things depend on water; plants and animals need water for life. Water comes down from heaven as rain, and although it is always the same in itself, it produces many different effects. In trees and plants and flowers, in fruit, in vines, in lakes and rivers and oceans.

Water was there right at the beginning of creation - the spirit hovered over the waters, even before God said let there be light, and then on the second day He separated water. It does not come down, now as one thing, now as another, but essentially the same, and yet it adapts itself perfectly to the needs of every thing and creature that receives it. As scientists search for life on other planets, and heavenly bodies, they look for water.

Water is the stuff of life. Without it, we are dead. Indeed 78% of a new baby is water. And as we grow older we are still made up of 60%+ water. We need water to survive. You can go without food for a long while. Mahatma Gandhi survived 21 days aged 74. Some hunger strikers have lasted even longer - 40 days or more. But without water? A generous estimate is a week. A more likely estimate is 3 or 4 days. We dehydrate. A key element of a modern society is deemed to be access to clean drinkable water.

When Jesus talks about "living" water, He is explaining that the Holy Spirit is similar. It is an essential ingredient, not just of our mortal life on Earth, but of our eternal life. We can give ourselves spiritual food in many ways - with worship, prayer and bible study.

And we can survive spiritually for quite a long period of backsliding, without these things. But if we deny ourselves the fountain of life, which is the Holy Spirit, we dry up quickly.

In the same way that, as gardeners, we carefully water our plants, flowers and trees, so that they can draw nutrients from the soil in which they exist, which keeps them alive, the Holy Spirit sustains the eternal life, which Jesus promised to all who believe in Him. Like a dry tree, which puts forth shoots when watered, the soul bears the fruit of holiness, when repentance opens it up to receiving the Holy Spirit. The Spirit never changes, but its effect on us is to change us in ways nothing else can, as a source of living water.

The Holy Spirit comes to save, to heal, to teach, to counsel, to strengthen, to console. It comes to enlighten the mind of one who receives it and, via them, the minds of others. As light strikes the eyes of someone coming out of darkness and into sunshine, enabling them to see clearly things they could not discern before in the darkness, so light floods the soul of anyone receiving the Holy Spirit. It opens up their vision. It enables them to see things beyond the range of human vision, things undreamt of.

Water has extraordinary properties. God designed it to perform so many different things. Its capabilities are literally miraculous, and it is hard to believe they arose by accident. Water exists in 3 different states mainly - Solid: Ice; Liquid: Water; and Vapour: Steam. They are all H₂O - two hydrogen atoms, and one oxygen atom in their simplest form.

As we consider the characteristics of water, let us see how living water acts similarly, since this helps us to illustrate just what the Holy Spirit can do for us, in a similar way. For like the Holy Spirit, water has some rather, unusual but very useful properties.

Most things expand with heat, and hence become less and less dense. But the density of water only increases until 4 centigrade, when it begins to reduce again. This is very useful because if it was densest at 0 degrees, lakes and seas would freeze from the bottom up, killing all life. The layer of ice floating on the top actually insulates the water below, which at 4 degrees sinks to the bottom where life can be more comfortable. And so it is with the Holy Spirit - which has the capability to warm the soul. Last Sunday was Aldersgate Sunday exactly 282 years since that extraordinary event. John Wesley described his experience as his heart being strangely warmed.

When our life seems to have gone cold, the Spirit can bring warmth.

Water is transparent. Like glass, it enables us to see things through it. It actually makes the bottom of a container seem nearer due to refraction.

The Holy Spirit gives us the ability and the wisdom to see the world as God sees it. If we are filled with the Spirit, we are transparent in an honest way - WYSIWIG. If we are looking down into a deep pit, the Spirit makes the bottom seem less deep.

Water is very difficult to compress, even under huge pressure. Even in deep oceans at 4km down, it only reduces in volume by 1.8%. And when we are under pressure, when the worries of the world bear down on us, the Holy Spirit can give us the capability to withstand the pressure, and not collapse.

Water has the highest level of surface tension of all fluids except mercury. This enables it to support pond skaters and the like and droplets to slide off surfaces. Of course the ultimate example of that was when Jesus Himself walked on water, and when for a brief moment Peter did as well. The Holy Spirit can stop us sinking.

Water is an excellent solvent and diluter, since it mixes with many other elements. It can dilute harmful substances and wash them away. It carves rivers in valleys. We marvel at the Grand Canyon, and other features carved out by the action of water. Similarly, the Holy Spirit can wash away our sins through forgiveness as we repent. Its presence can reduce the harmful effects of the world's morality around us. It can dissipate the effects of anger, temptation and sin, and of illness through prayer. And it can cut through the strongest of obstacles, by long and persistent action.

Water is an unusual carbonless compound. Few such are liquid at room temperature. This enables us to consume it conveniently, and for our bodies to absorb it quickly. Drinking water is much easier than crunching on ice cubes or inhaling steam. Similarly, the Holy Spirit is available to us in normal circumstances too. It does not require exceptional laboratory like conditions for us to acquire it. Water has strong adhesive and cohesive qualities enabling it to bond with other atoms, resulting in its ability to climb up narrow channels through capillary action. The Holy Spirit is the most powerful binding agent for communities of faith. It holds together believers, as it did during that first outpouring at Pentecost. Without

it, Christian communities, bodies of believers, churches will fall apart.

Finally, Water is denser than us. This is useful as it means we don't sink, but we swim.

It means that when we rest in it, without struggling, we float. It is just right for holding us. Archimedes discovered this in his bath, and hurried to proclaim it with "Eureka". When a body is immersed in fluid it gets an upthrust equal to the weight of fluid displaced. When we rest in the Holy Spirit, it supports us and the deeper we immerse ourselves, the greater the lift we experience in our lives. Indeed our own spirits are lifted.

So it's no surprise that Jesus chose to use water as a way of describing the Holy Spirit. He used water in many ways in His life on Earth. He changed it into wine, He walked on it, He was baptised in it. He said washing with it cleansed your outside not your inside.

But Jesus also said that the Holy Spirit was a fountain of living water. In other words the Spirit could do all that ordinary water does and much more. So in our own walk with Jesus, in our Christian life of faith, we need to drink living water. If we view ourselves as plants, nourished by living water, we should expect to bear fruits.

But whilst the spiritual experience we have through the Holy Spirit, is in our heart, we also have a deeply factual, corroborated store of knowledge and wisdom, in our head. When we have to make decisions, make choices, when we have to take sides in a debate, the main influencers of the outcome are often characterised as our head and our heart. Which of the two is dominant in your relationship with Jesus? Head or heart?

Do you grow mainly through experiencing spirit filled worship, built on strong emotion? Or do you find that you are fed mostly through study of the Bible and learning from it? Pentecost prompts us to consider whether we should give more focus to the Holy Spirit.

When you've almost finished the jigsaw and there's just 1 piece to go, where do you look? Where is the last piece? Clearly it's in the box, if it's anywhere, and it will fit perfectly. But sadly, people trying to understand life, often look for the missing piece in other boxes. They seem to feel that although all the pieces so far have come from one box, the missing piece might have come from somewhere completely different. And they will open other boxes and try to force an incorrect piece into the jigsaw piece hole in

their life's picture. But God provided the picture, and the Holy Spirit, which Jesus promised, is that last piece.

Those first disciples had a wonderful jigsaw picture of life, which Jesus had shown them. They had a boxful of pieces, very nearly put together, but there was a final piece missing. And that's the piece they discovered at Pentecost, with the arrival of the Holy Spirit. Are we missing a jigsaw piece? Is ours an intellectual faith, full just of head knowledge?

The disciples had known Jesus the person - that in itself was an experience worth sharing. But after Pentecost, with the arrival of the Holy Spirit, they were transformed people.

My prayer this Pentecost is that we all may experience the fountain of living water, which Jesus promised to all who turn to Him, so that we do not just know about Jesus, and we do not just have a faith in our head, but we know Jesus deep within our heart too. That what Pentecost was for, that's what it is about - the living water of the Holy Spirit. And that Spirit reveals itself in different ways in each one of us. So let us use those gifts.

A Poem

We wait and we wait.
We have tried to move on from lockdown
But weary and dispirited, we are back
Together in the upper room,
Savouring that feeling of safety,
Closeness and containment

We wait and we wait.
Locked in to our own thoughts,
Listening to each heartbeat,
Listening to each breath,
Trying to retain memories of His voice:
The promise of peace and the kiss of His breath.

We wait and we wait.
In silence,
Fidgety with expectation.
On edge,
Excitement building,
Nerves stretched by the interval.

We wait and we wait.
Dreaming and imagining,
Comforter and whisperer,

Guide and helper
Impatient for
The gift that is constant and eternal.

Now.
No longer waiting,
An explosion of energy
Blows away lethargy,
Blows away anxiety,
Blows away fear.

Now.
No longer dispirited,
Caught in the updraft,
Ablaze with warmth,
Ablaze with light,
Ablaze in God's glory.

Now.
No longer silent,
A torrent of words gush from lips.
The Word overflows, escaping
Onto the street,
Into our world.

Now,
The power of God's story,
Of our story,
Breathes life,
Breathes love,
Breathes peace.

A time of prayer

On all those who are sick, in body, mind and spirit, O Living God have mercy.

On those who are lonely or afraid, those who suffer from anxiety or whose souls are discomfited, O Living God have mercy.

On all those whose lives are dedicated to service; our NHS staff, the hospitality industry, our farmers and many others, O Living God have mercy.

On those who are never able to attend their place of worship, who suffer persecution and oppression and live in deprivation, O Living God have mercy.

On those who fear they are unworthy and unwelcome in church. Who do not feel included in your Kingdom, O Living God have mercy.

On those who do not know your peace, for whatever reason, O Living God have mercy.

Time to add our own prayers of the heart, either spoken or unspoken.

Everlasting God, whose very nature is love that has no end, hear our prayers. Help us to never make you in our own image but remain in awe of your mystery, the God who was, who is and who will always be. In the name of Christ, who shows us how to love, amen.

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father

Hymn: Listen to *the Taizé chant "Within our darkest night"*

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J8BmvxqJH0g)

[v=J8BmvxqJH0g](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J8BmvxqJH0g)

or sing a verse of a hymn that comes to mind

A prayer of blessing

Holy God, guard me and guide me and hide me in your heart. Bless me and all those made in your image in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, now and forever. Amen.