

Winchester, Eastleigh & Romsey Circuit
SERVICE AT HOME – Sunday 28th May 2023

prepared by the Revd Tim Searle

Preparation

As we prepare to welcome the Holy Spirit into our worship and into our lives, let us still our minds and relax our senses, letting go of our need to be in control and, in so, doing allowing the Spirit to move freely within us.

Pause

Call to Worship

God speaks to us

IN THE RICHES OF CREATION

God speaks to us

IN THE STORIES OF JESUS

God speaks to us

IN THE LIVES OF OTHER PEOPLE

God speaks to us

IN WORDS AND WAYS THAT WE CAN UNDERSTAND

God of fire and beauty

WARM US

God of peace and justice

DISTURB US

God of wind and wonder

AMAZE US

God of Pentecost

KINDLE YOUR LOVE IN OUR LIVES

Listen, Read, Pray or Sing Along

Holy Spirit, we welcome you (StF 385)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3gqUFZdNCpA>

Holy Spirit, we welcome you,
Holy Spirit, we welcome you!
Move among us with holy fire
as we lay aside all earthly desire,
hands reach out and our hearts aspire.
Holy Spirit, Holy Spirit,
Holy Spirit, we welcome you!

Holy Spirit, we welcome you,
Holy Spirit, we welcome you!
Let the breeze of your presence blow
that your children here might truly know
how to move in the Spirit's flow.
Holy Spirit, Holy Spirit,
Holy Spirit, we welcome you!

Holy Spirit, we welcome you,
Holy Spirit, we welcome you!
Please accomplish in me today
some new work of loving grace, I pray –
unreservedly – have your way.
Holy Spirit, Holy Spirit,
Holy Spirit, we welcome you!

Christopher Alan Bowater (b. 1947)

A Prayer of Approach

Spirit of God,
flickering over our heads,
illuminating our faces,
inspiring our thoughts.

Give us now, we pray,
WORDS OF JOY AND PRAISE.

Spirit of God,
filling our hearts with hope,
steadying our nerves with peace,
comforting our lives with love.

Give us now, we pray,
WORDS OF JOY AND PRAISE.

Spirit of God,
come to us now –
surging through the darkness of our lives,
sweeping over our weariness –
so that, in this time of Pentecost,
the sparkling light of faith,
the rushing wind of hope
and the joyful sound of praise
may echo round the world,
may echo in the church,
and find their response in us.
Spirit of God, give us now, we pray,
WORDS OF JOY AND PRAISE. AMEN

Read Numbers 11. 24 – 30

Read Acts 2. 1 – 12

Listen, Read, Pray or Sing Along

Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on me (StF 395)

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

Spirit of the living God,
fall afresh on me.
Spirit of the living God,
fall afresh on me.
Melt me, mould me,
fill me, use me.
Spirit of the living God,
fall afresh on me.

Daniel Iverson (1890-1977)

Reflection

You may have noticed that I missed out the last verse of today's usual reading from the Acts of the Apostles. Ordinarily the pericope finishes at v. 13 with the naysayers of the crowd retorting, 'They are filled with new wine.' The omission is deliberate because I want our encounter with this passage to end with the same question that it does: 'What does this mean?' What did it mean for the disciples and the crowds 2000 years ago, and what does it mean to us today?

For those who were looking on at the apostles, the sight must have been both terrifying and mind-blowing in equal measure. Did the apostles each speak one discernible human language, one Greek, another Latin, another Arabic and so on, or was it the language of heaven, something 'other worldly' that took the limits of language to a higher plane? Were the disciples all speaking at the same time, a kind of prophetic megamix, or did they speak one at a time, taking it in turns to utter the language the Spirit had bestowed upon them? Of course, we cannot know what the scene looked like, or sounded like, or felt like, however much we would like to. But that shouldn't stop us imagining the scene and immersing ourselves in a moment of such intense spiritual power.

Whatever the means, and however it took place, the Spirit's purpose was accomplished. The gathered crowds heard and, furthermore, they understood. We can conclude from this that the 'what' and 'how' of this spectacular event might be interesting to ponder, but the 'why' is what really matters. Rewinding to chapter 1 tells us that the apostles had returned to Jerusalem following the ascension to be baptised by the Spirit as Jesus had instructed. The apostles, as

they were waiting on the Spirit, devoted themselves to prayer along with other believers in their company. Peter preaches to the believers telling them of the downfall of Judas and then goes on to elect Matthias as his replacement. Peter, quoting from Psalms, says to them, "Let another take his position of overseer." For the scholars among you, it's interesting to note that the Greek word Luke-Acts uses in 1.20 for overseer is 'episkopon' (lit. 'office') from which is derived *episcopal* and latterly *bishop*. So, a level of hierarchy in Christian communities was already starting to emerge when Luke-Acts wrote.

What all this tells us is that the 'why' was to ignite the fledgling Church into life. To take them from listening to speaking, from being students to being teachers, from being followers to being those who *were* followed, from recipients of the Word to the means by which the Word was communicated. But the most precious ingredient was still missing. They had the people, they had the leaders, and they had the skills, but they didn't yet have the Holy Spirit, as Jesus had promised them. So, the 'why' comes into full view. It was the Spirit who transformed a group of people into the Church of Christ.

As it was then, so it is now. If we want to become the fully activated, fully realised Church of Christ then we must be filled with the Holy Spirit. It's what changes us from being just another group of people, however special that group might be, into the set apart witnesses of God's Word in the world. Without the Spirit dwelling in us, and speaking through us, I would venture as far as saying that our identity as Church risks being called into question.

What then does being filled with the Spirit actually look like? To return to Luke-Acts original question in v.12, 'what does this mean?' Some of you (like me) when faced with this question are already sceptical about the phrase 'being filled with the Spirit'. I remember as a teenager going along to a variety of evangelism events where, after a (lengthy!) period of preaching, the evangelist would offer the audience a chance to come forward to be ministered to. It was at such meetings that I first heard about being 'slain' by the Spirit, the moment that, when prayed for, the

recipient would collapse and pass out. I always found this term somewhat strange! Why would a Holy Spirit whose very nature is to fill, embolden, enable, and empower want to *slay* anything? I remember digging my heels in at such events and saying to myself, 'if the Spirit wants me on the floor there's nothing I can do to stop it. 'It' never happened. Maybe I'm just not holy enough 😊.

After all, did the disciples, on that first day of Pentecost look slain? Anything but. Filled with the Spirit they were empowered to bear witness to God's deeds of power, not just to a few, but to all. So, being filled with the Spirit isn't something to be afraid of. Rather the Spirit's presence within us completes us and makes us whole. To allow this though, we need to give the Holy Spirit space to inhabit our thinking and our feeling. It's a natural human instinct to want to be in control, but the nature of the Spirit is to push against this, not in an overpowering way, but gently inviting us to reassess who we are and what we centre our lives on.

The apostles set themselves apart for a short while and devoted themselves to prayer. They were obedient to Christ and made space for the Holy Spirit to move within and through them. The result was the birthing of something new. May we, as did they on that first Pentecost, make space to invite the Holy Spirit into our lives and our churches. May we be bold in telling of the mighty deeds of God and the Good News of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Holy Spirit, we welcome you!

Prayers of Intercession

Spirit of the Living God,
from Holy Wisdom brooding on the waters of
creation to the Spirit with us now
and enabling us to worship,
you have been gently and powerfully at work in
our history.

We praise you, O God;
FILL US WITH YOUR SPIRIT!

Spirit of the Living God,
breathing life into all that lives and loves,

inspiring work and choices, guiding and moulding,
you are still gently and powerfully at work in our
world.

We praise you, O God;
FILL US WITH YOUR SPIRIT!

Spirit of the Living God,
from knitting us together in our mother's wombs
to embracing us while we draw our last breaths,
you are gently and powerfully at work in our
lives.

We praise you, O God;
FILL US WITH YOUR SPIRIT!

Spirit of the Living God,
we ask that you hold in your arms all who are sick
or sorrowful this day ...

Silence

We ask your comfort for all those who mourn,
whether recently bereaved or reliving deep
sorrow from the past ...

Silence

Spirit of the Living God,
fall afresh on us,
freshen us, renew us,
open our eyes to the needful tasks
and our own abilities to fulfil the work.

Enable us to be identified as God's holy people
by our love and joy,
our peace and patience,
our kindness and generosity,
our faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.
May we shine as lights in the world to the glory of
God.

We praise you, O God;
FILL US WITH YOUR SPIRIT!

We bring all our prayers together by praying the
prayer Jesus taught us ...

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name;
thy kingdom come;
thy will be done;
on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation;
but deliver us from evil.

For thine is the kingdom,
the power and the glory,
for ever and ever. Amen.

Listen, Read, Pray or Sing Along

When deep despair casts out all light (StF 399)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3udKlpMrWkk>

When deep despair casts out all light
and hope is wearing thin;
come Spirit, dance with gentle grace,
shine through the dullness we embrace
and make the colours sing;
and make the colours sing.

When greed dictates that children die
and poverty holds sway;
come Spirit, burn as living flame,
prompt us to act to end this shame;
cast apathy away;
cast apathy away.

When colour, lifestyle, creed or name
cause groundless hate and fear;
come Spirit, weave a web of peace,
that prejudice and violence cease;
reveal God's purpose here;
reveal God's purpose here.

When guilt and fear tear us apart
and faith's a bitter thing;
come Spirit, dance with gentle grace,
shine through the dullness we embrace
and make God's colours sing;
and make God's colours sing.

Dismissal and Blessing

Spirit of fire,
**INFLAME IN US A PASSION FOR JUSTICE AND
EQUALITY.**
Spirit of compassion,
**INFUSE US WITH YOUR LONGINGS FOR
WHOLENESS AND HAPPINESS.**
Spirit of wisdom,
**BE WITHIN US IN OUR JOURNEYING, GENTLY
GUIDING US ALONG RIGHT PATHS.**

Creator, Saviour, Spirit
be with us all,
near and far,
now and evermore. Amen

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