

# LORDSBRIDGE TEAM OF CHURCHES



## ***The Church's prayer for Sunday 23<sup>rd</sup> May***

Holy Spirit, sent by the Father;  
ignite in us your holy fire;  
strengthen your children with the gift of faith,  
revive your Church with the breath of love,  
and renew the face of the earth,  
through Jesus Christ our Lord.  
Amen

## **Bible readings and reflection for Sunday 23<sup>rd</sup> May**

### **A New Testament reading from Acts, Chapter 2:1-21**

#### **The Holy Spirit Comes at Pentecost**

<sup>2</sup> When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. <sup>2</sup> Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. <sup>3</sup> They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. <sup>4</sup> All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues<sup>[a]</sup> as the Spirit enabled them.

<sup>5</sup> Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven. <sup>6</sup> When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard their own language being spoken. <sup>7</sup> Utterly amazed, they asked: "Aren't all these who are speaking Galileans?" <sup>8</sup> Then how is it that each of us hears them in our native language? <sup>9</sup> Parthians, Medes and Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia,<sup>[b]</sup> <sup>10</sup> Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene; visitors from Rome <sup>11</sup> (both Jews and converts to Judaism); Cretans and Arabs—we hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!" <sup>12</sup> Amazed and perplexed, they asked one another, "What does this mean?"

<sup>13</sup> Some, however, made fun of them and said, "They have had too much wine."

#### **Peter Addresses the Crowd**

<sup>14</sup> Then Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice and addressed the crowd: "Fellow Jews and all of you who live in Jerusalem, let me explain this to you; listen

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carefully to what I say. <sup>15</sup> These people are not drunk, as you suppose. It's only nine in the morning! <sup>16</sup> No, this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel:

<sup>17</sup> "In the last days, God says,

I will pour out my Spirit on all people.

Your sons and daughters will prophesy,

your young men will see visions,

your old men will dream dreams.

<sup>18</sup> Even on my servants, both men and women,

I will pour out my Spirit in those days,

and they will prophesy.

<sup>19</sup> I will show wonders in the heavens above

and signs on the earth below,

blood and fire and billows of smoke.

<sup>20</sup> The sun will be turned to darkness

and the moon to blood

before the coming of the great and glorious day of the Lord.

<sup>21</sup> And everyone who calls

on the name of the Lord will be saved.<sup>†</sup>

## **A Gospel reading from the Gospel of John, Chapter 15:26-27 and Chapter 16:4-15**

### **The Work of the Holy Spirit**

<sup>26</sup> "When the Advocate comes, whom I will send to you from the Father—the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father—he will testify about me. <sup>27</sup> And you also must testify, for you have been with me from the beginning.

<sup>4</sup> I have told you this, so that when their time comes you will remember that I warned you about them. I did not tell you this from the beginning because I was with you, <sup>5</sup> but now I am going to him who sent me. None of you asks me, 'Where are you going?' <sup>6</sup> Rather, you are filled with grief because I have said these things. <sup>7</sup> But very truly I tell you, it is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Advocate will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you. <sup>8</sup> When he comes, he will prove the world to be in the wrong about sin and righteousness and

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judgment: <sup>9</sup> about sin, because people do not believe in me; <sup>10</sup> about righteousness, because I am going to the Father, where you can see me no longer; <sup>11</sup> and about judgment, because the prince of this world now stands condemned.

<sup>12</sup> "I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear. <sup>13</sup> But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. <sup>14</sup> He will glorify me because it is from me that he will receive what he will make known to you. <sup>15</sup> All that belongs to the Father is mine. That is why I said the Spirit will receive from me what he will make known to you."

## **A reflection from Revd Priscilla Slusar, Rural Dean and Lordsbridge Team support minister**

Today's reading from the Acts of the Apostles gives us a dramatic account of the early disciples receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit. There's the noise of a mighty wind, tongues of fire and the disciples becoming bold and courageous as they are filled with the Holy Spirit.

I remember attending a clergy training session once when we were each given a blank piece of paper and were asked to write down one sentence about the significance of the Holy Spirit. We then had to pass the paper on for the next person to add something different – a bit like a game of Consequences. This carried on until we had 6 or 7 statements on the paper.

What would you have written?

It was amazing to see the variety of things that were written. Here are a few of them:

- The Holy Spirit is given to us by the grace of God
- The Holy Spirit shows us the closeness of God
- The coming of the Holy Spirit commissions us to serve God and spread the gospel
- The Holy Spirit brings us a sense of community and fellowship
- The Holy Spirit is portrayed as a wind – or flames – or a dove.

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The Holy Spirit is often referred to as female/she. To be politically correct God is not gender specific so we shouldn't use "he" or "she".

The role of the Holy Spirit varies – as the Comforter, or Advocate, or as the Spirit of Truth, displaying wisdom and bringing judgement.

So many ideas and interpretations.

The theologian Jane Williams, wife of Rowan Williams the former Archbishop of Canterbury, says that "the Holy Spirit has been in danger in recent years of becoming the sappy one of the Trinity." The Holy Spirit doesn't do uncomfortable things like going off to be crucified. The Holy Spirit gives spectacular gifts that add excitement to otherwise dreary lives. The Holy Spirit may be described as "the comforter", which sounds soft and lovely.

But the Holy Spirit is by no means sappy!

The Holy Spirit gives Peter and the other disciples the courage to speak out and spread the gospel to others. Peter talks of the Spirit coming at a time of judgement, when people will need to decide whether to hear the word of God and be saved or to reject salvation. Inspired by the Spirit, Peter preaches the gospel with courage but we know that this leads ultimately to his death. So the Spirit challenged the people of Jerusalem on that first day and challenges us now.

The Holy Spirit brings us new life through the good news of the gospel. It is no accident that the arrival of the Holy Spirit came at the time of an important Jewish festival. The Feast of Pentecost, or Feast of Weeks as it was called, was the end of the celebration of the spring harvest, when people gave thanks for God's goodness and bounty. It was also a time when Jewish people renewed their covenant with God, emphasising the importance of their relationship with God. It was a time of endings (end of harvest) and beginnings (renewal of the relationship with God). At this feast of Pentecost the Holy Spirit brings new life for the church and new life for individuals within the church.

One of the wonders of the gift of the Holy Spirit is that this gift of God's grace touches everyone present. All the disciples (men and women) feel the power of the Holy Spirit and then they pass on this message to everyone in the streets, regardless of their background or ethnicity. This outpouring of God's love touches everyone.

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Of course, not everyone responded in a positive way! Some people were not prepared to listen, some mocked, some referred to drunkenness as a way of avoiding the truth. It's the same nowadays.

This morning's reading from Acts ends with Peter's speech, giving a quotation from the prophet Joel. This prophecy seems to be about death and destruction but in this new age of the Spirit it becomes a declaration of life and hope. "Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved." The Holy Spirit brings confidence, courage and hope – not a soppy image at all!

The Holy Spirit is the fulfilment of Jesus' promise that God is always with us, for all time. As Christians we want to feel that presence of God with us. We want to be aware of God's love; we want to feel a sense of awe and wonder. Have you experienced that presence of the Holy Spirit? If you have, is it something you talk about? Should we, like Peter, be challenged to share that message of salvation with others?

A few years ago there was an article in the Church Times by the Bishop of Worcester, Dr John Inge. He argued that many people have experienced a deep awareness of the presence of the Holy Spirit but do not tend to talk about it. He quoted a national survey when people were asked "Have you ever been aware of, or influenced by, a presence or power, whether you call it God or not, which is different from your everyday self?" The results indicated that more than half of the adult population of Britain said that they had had an experience of this kind.

Here are some examples:

In the countryside - "I became so overcome with the glory of the natural world that I fell on my knees in prayer, thanking God for the glories of his kingdom and for allowing me to share them."

In a street in a town - "I loved all these people, that they were mine and I theirs ... we were all part of the human race. I had a feeling of immense joy that I was a member of the race in which God himself had become incarnate."

These are not the kinds of comments that we usually make to each other when we sit down to have a chat over a cup of coffee! But these experiences bring God close to us in our lives. They are transformative experiences, changing our everyday existence into something special, giving us a touch of the divine. The Holy Spirit draws us together in a sense of unity – unity with each other and unity with God. It is this

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presence that we celebrate today in the feast of Pentecost; and it is this presence that gives us the courage to witness to the truth of Jesus in our daily lives.

**Amen**