

starters for Sunday

Day of Pentecost

8 June 2014

The Mission and Discipleship Council would like to thank the Very Rev Bill Hewitt, former Moderator of the General Assembly, for his thoughts on the Day of Pentecost.

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Quick Guide...

Helping people prepare for reading the Bible in worship can make a real difference. Overcoming nerves, reading in ways suitable to the text, speaking clearly etc.

You may wish to email these three links to the people reading Scripture on Sunday to support them in their involvement in worship: [Managing your nerves](#); [Creative readings](#); [Worship at the Lectern](#)

Introduction

This is Pentecost Sunday and unless you are a regular church go-er this day will pass you by.

We celebrate the birth of Jesus and all the world joins with us to celebrate Christmas. We celebrate His resurrection, and most of the world recognises Easter as a very special day on the calendar. Maybe Pentecost does not get much attention because the greeting card companies have not yet commercialised it. Yet, this day is important, because Pentecost is the Birthday of the Church, a day of celebration and challenge and change. Unlike going to an ordinary birthday celebration on this day Instead of us giving a gift to celebrate a birthday we receive. We know the phrase 'it is better to give than receive' but today we allow God to give and graciously receive this most precious gift.

Today we celebrate the coming of God's spirit, the gift of the Holy Spirit breathed into the lives of men and women.

[Numbers 11: 24-30](#)

The Spirit shared with the elders of Israel

This is a remarkable story from the days when the Israelites were wandering in the wilderness.

Moses was feeling the burden of leadership, the people were complaining and Moses gave out his own complaint to the Lord (11). Moses' father-in-law Jethro had long since advised him to delegate some of his responsibility to able elders (Exodus 18:21-23): but here it seems Moses is struggling 'I can't be responsible for all these people by myself; it's too much for me!' So the Lord told Moses to assemble 70 respected men who are recognised as leaders. The seventy were gathered around the tabernacle, and the Spirit came upon them and they began to prophesy. (24-25).



But what is of interest here is not the seventy, but the two who remained in the Camp who also received the Spirit and who were then also able to prophesy (26). Why the two remained in the Camp we cannot tell, but a young man ran to tell Moses what they were doing, presumably not happy at their actions. Are there times when we too might question the actions of those who speak in the name of Christ? It is not up to us to limit or decree where God's Spirit might work. He is Sovereign, and will work when and where - and with whom - He pleases.

It is hardly surprising that this matter was reported to Moses (27).

Joshua who had been Moses helper since he was young, for whatever reason, was also upset at this and tried to tell Moses to stop them prophesying. (28).

Moses response was in itself prophetic: "I wish that the Lord would give His Spirit to all his people and make all people his prophets." (29).

This prophecy filters itself through Joel 2:28-29, and finds its way into the Apostle Peter's explanation of the events of the day of Pentecost in Acts 2: 15-18.

[Psalm 104: 24-34,35b](#)

O Lord, how wonderful is your creation

This psalm has much in common with the first account of creation in Genesis 1: 2 - 4a with its "seven day," structure.

This is a Hymn of Praise, offered in the course of Temple worship, probably at the Autumnal harvest festival, given its theme of creation. It is a poem praising God and celebrating the order, the balance and majesty of creation reflecting upon God's mighty power and loving care.

The Jewish people sang this psalm on Yom Kippur (The Day of Atonement) as they began a new year in repentance for past sins. The Day of Atonement was a special Holy Day for the Jewish people because it was on that one day of the year the High Priest would make a sacrifice for the sins of ALL the people and he would enter into the Holy of Holies... into God's presence... and place the blood of the sacrifice on the Mercy Seat and the sins of the people would be covered.

When the High Priest fulfilled this task... the sins of the people were forgiven.



It was during this Holy Day that Israelites could sense the closeness of God. A God who was not only mighty but a God who cared for them.

Verses 24-34 the main part of today's reading, proclaim the greatness of the Lord's works.

The language used has echoes of mythical accounts of creation, speaking especially of the sea as a place of great mystery and danger where great creatures go. The emphasis is on Creation's dependence on God, not only for food and sustenance but for our very life itself. (vv. 27-30).

Verse 29 talks of the very breath of God, or spirit of God which has echoes of Gen 2: 7 where God breathed life-giving breath into man, giving life itself. In a similar way although the psalm is not speaking directly about the Holy Spirit as we might understand that in New Testament terms there is an obvious link. God's act of sustaining life and giving new life is not disassociated from what we see as the work of the Spirit. The point is that all creation and its creatures are totally dependent on God's presence and 'breath'.

This psalm has been called the "pearl of the Psalter". It is poetry, but much more than that. It is direct praise of the Lord. He is not a one time, creator who has long since left his creation to its own devices and designs. He is involved in everything and with his breathe new life is sustained.

[Acts 2: 1-21](#)

The day of Pentecost

The literal meaning of Pentecost is "50 days". In the Old Testament it was positioned on the Jewish calendar seven weeks after the Passover. It was the Jewish Feast of Harvest and was equivalent to our Harvest Thanksgiving Day. The high point of the celebration was the bringing of two loaves of bread, made from the newly harvested wheat, which symbolised the dedication of the harvest to God. In Acts we see the dedication of some 3000 people as a harvest of converted souls. (Acts 4:1)

On the Christian calendar, Pentecost occurs 7 weeks after Easter. It was on that day that the Holy Spirit was poured out upon the believers in an upper room in Jerusalem as they awaited the baptism Jesus told them they would receive. Jesus had promised this event just before He ascended into heaven. He said, "Wait for the gift my Father promised. John baptised with water; but in a few days you will be baptised with the Holy Spirit." (Acts 1:4-5)



Then in verse 8 it is repeated: “But when the Holy Spirit comes upon you, you will be filled with power and you will be witnesses for me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

They were already believers. For the forty days since his death Jesus had appeared to them many times until he told them of the coming of this gift. This 10-day of prayer and waiting must have witnessed the emptying of themselves so that they could receive the fullness of the Holy Spirit. This same commitment to prayer and expectation is a part of the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit in our personal life.

The coming of the Spirit on these people led to the remarkable images of tongues of fire and noise coming from the sky. Commentators however would say the more remarkable things is that all those who were gathered heard the good news of Jesus in their own language.

The first Christian Pentecost was the fulfilment of prophetic promise. In Acts 2:16-18, 21, Peter left no doubt about it: “This is what was spoken of through the prophet Joel: ‘And it shall be in the last days,’ God says, ‘that I will pour forth my Spirit upon all flesh...’”

This is the day in which the mission of the church was given birth. The New Testament church was called, commissioned, and empowered to go out into all the world with its universal message, calling everyone to a personal faith in the risen Lord.

[John 20: 19-23](#)

"Receive the Holy Spirit"

In the Old Testament the Hebrew word ruach could be translated ‘spirit,’ ‘breath,’ or ‘wind,’ depending on the context. The same is true with the Greek word pneuma, used 68 times in the book of Acts.

Jesus breathed on his disciples and gave them the Holy Spirit. This is at the conclusion of his earthly ministry, after the resurrection and before his ascension. Jesus breathed on the disciples as a foreshadowing of the Spirit they were to receive at Pentecost. Jesus message is that His followers need His Spirit to continue His work.

There is no doubt that when John spoke about the breath of God in this way he was thinking back to the story of creation of humankind. This was the same picture as Ezekiel saw in the



valley of the dead dry bones when he heard God say to the wind 'Come from every direction to breathe into these dead bodies and to bring them back to life' (Ezekiel 37:9). The coming of the Holy Spirit is like the waking of life from the dead and it is the same as it was for Ezekiel.

When Jesus breathed on them and commanded them to receive the Holy Spirit He was reminding them of the creative life-force emanating from the being of God. So insistent was Jesus that His disciples receive the Holy Spirit He told them not to begin the mission until they had been filled with this power. 'I myself will send you what my Father has promised; but you must stay in the city until the power from above comes down upon you.' (Luke 24: 49)

The gift of the Holy Spirit came during the Jewish Festival of Pentecost. It is seen by historians and theologians as the birth of the church. Though the two stories of the gift of the Holy Spirit are different in time and experience, they do share central truths that help us understand how the Holy Spirit moves in our lives today.

When it comes upon the Church, she is recreated for her task.

Sermon Ideas

The gift of the Holy Spirit is seen by historians and theologians as the birth of the church. The two texts from John and Acts are different in time and experience, yet they share central truths that help us understand how the Holy Spirit moves in our lives today. The breath of God which came to that upper room, also visits each of us. We are filled with that wind. Sometimes, we ignore it. Sometimes we allow it to move us. No matter what we do, the wind of God, the breath of God dwells in us.

The breath of God, the wind of God is powerful. We associate breath as a gentle warming action, the breath of God, the Spirit of God came to give power to the church so that it might proclaim the mighty acts of God through Christ. Again we have images of the wind that have caused chaos in recent times as hurricanes and tornados destroy vast areas of countryside. The wind of God came to earth not to destroy, but to build up. It came to earth so that Peter and the others were compelled to leave that upper room and go into the highways and preach. The breath of God moves us to go beyond the safe. The coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost tells of a power of God that is anything but safe. We see this power whenever people stand up for justice and



equality whenever oppressive and dehumanising systems and structures are brought down. It may be that if we believe in the power of God, we will have to allow God's spirit to wreak some chaos – into our complacency, into our assumptions, perhaps into our churches.

Pentecost is a day to be challenged and also to be changed. No longer were the disciples confused, now they understood the plan of salvation completely. No longer were they timid, now they were confident, speaking publicly. This is the same Peter who two months earlier was so afraid for his own life that he had denied that he even knew Jesus, never mind being one of his followers. Now he was speaking in public to the crowd with confidence and an understanding that he had never had before. Peter did not simply change his mind, he himself was changed. Along with the other disciples they boldly went to change the world.

There was another change that took place on Pentecost, and you could argue that this change was more spectacular than what happened to the disciples. After Peter preached his sermon on Pentecost, 3000 people came to faith and were baptised. We don't know much about these people. We do know that Jerusalem was packed with people, because of the Festival of Pentecost. Jews from all over the Roman empire came. 3000 of them who were not Christians, who did not believe in Jesus Christ, were changed that day. Their whole way of looking at God, at themselves, at the world, at eternal life – everything had changed. Now they knew that they were at peace with God. Now they knew that Jesus was their Saviour.

It goes without saying our world today needs change. We are asked to change from spectators to active disciples, from watching other people do things to be those leading the change.

On our own we cannot do it, following our own agenda we will fail. We need first to acknowledge and accept the power of the Holy Spirit and move by its prompting and guiding. Remember Jesus tells the disciples that they need the power of the Holy Spirit. Even spending three years in His presence was not enough to equip them for the work that lay ahead.

The gift of the Holy Spirit means action. It is not given to us so that we might feel good but so that we are equipped for a task. Not so that we can better spiritually but so that we can carry out that great commission and witness to the ends of the earth.



Illustration

The chief executive of a manufacturing company told a public meeting that his number one priority was to turn his managers into leaders so that they could breathe new life into that organisation.

As a church how much more do we need our members to become leaders breathing new life into every aspect of our community, political, social, health, education.

Prayers

Collect

Almighty and ever-living God,
you fulfilled the promises of Easter
by sending your Holy Spirit
and opening the way of life eternal
to every race and nation.

Keep us in the unity of your Spirit,
that every tongue may tell of your glory;
through Jesus Christ our Lord,
who lives and reigns
with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.

Resources

The power of God can invade the body, inflate the mind,
swell the soul, lift the Spirit and make us more than we ever imagined.

It'll make you young when you're old,
and it'll make you live even when you die.

The power and presence of the Spirit will disturb, delight, deliver and lift.

When God sends forth the Spirit,
"the whole face of the earth is renewed."



When God sends forth the Spirit
chaos is changed into creation
the Red Sea opens up to a highway of freedom.

When God sends forth the Spirit:
A young woman says "Yes".
Jesus is born and
life is never the same.

When God sends forth the Spirit amazing things happen:
barriers are broken,
communities are formed,
opposites are reconciled,
unity is established,
disease is cured,
addiction is broken,
cities are renewed,
races are reconciled,
hope is established,
people are blessed,
and church happens.

Today the Spirit of God is present
and we're gonna, have church.

So be ready, get ready... God is up to something...
discouraged folks cheer up,
dishonest folks 'fees up,
sour folks sweeten up,
closed folk, open up,
gossipers shut up,
conflicted folks make up,
sleeping folks wake up,



lukewarm folk, fire up,
dry bones shake up,
and pew potatoes stand up!
But most of all, Christ the Saviour of all the world is lifted up...

(Source unknown)

A Litany to the Holy Spirit

Holy Spirit, you are the Lord, the giver of life;
with the Father and the Son we worship and glorify you:

Come to us now, Spirit of God.

Holy Spirit, you were there at creation before time began;
your presence fills the whole universe:

Come to us now, Spirit of life.

Holy Spirit, you have spoken through the prophets of old;
by their witness the Word of God has never been silent:

Come to us now, Spirit of wisdom.

Holy Spirit, you surround the waiting church with the wind of Pentecost;
you gave life and breath to announce Christ's gospel:

Come to us now, Spirit of power.

Holy Spirit, you came upon the first Christians as a holy fire;
you set their hearts ablaze with devotion to their risen Lord:

Come to us now, Spirit of love.

Holy Spirit, you pour out your rich and varied gifts;
you call us to bring forth your fruits in our lives:

Come to us now, Spirit of grace.

Holy Spirit, you are the Spirit of truth, the Counsellor;
you lead us to the truth that sets us free:

Come to us now, Spirit of God, and renew Christ's holy church.

(From *Uniting in Worship*, People's Book)



Pentecost – Open to the Spirit

Almighty and loving God,
we gather together today
as those joined by your Holy Spirit.

We come remembering your ancient promise
to send your Spirit upon all people,
young and old,
male and female,
Jew and Gentile.

Move within us we pray.

We come remembering that first Pentecost
when your Spirit was given to the apostles,
renewing their faith and transforming their lives.

Move within us we pray.

We come, on this Pentecost Sunday,
reminded of the constant work of your Spirit,
inspiring,
guiding,
challenging,
refining.

Move within us we pray.

Almighty God, Spirit of truth,
come as you promised
and reveal to us more of the way of Christ.
Come and fill us with deeper faith and greater love.
Give us the gifts we need to work for your kingdom,
inspire us with new vision and purpose,
and breathe your power into our lives.

Move within us we pray.



Almighty and loving God,
open our hearts and minds and souls to your Spirit,
whoever we may be,
and so equip us to live as your people,
not just this but every day,
our lives reflecting your glory
and proclaiming your love.

***Move within us we pray,
to the glory of your name.***

Amen .

(From *Prayers for all Seasons*. Nick Fawcett)

Time with Children

www.Sermons4kids.com is a good site that has many different ideas for Pentecost Sunday. One uses a balloon that is uninflated and lifeless until it is blown up. Either inflate with balloon pump or simply by blowing. When full of air you could let it go and see it fly through the Church or tie a knot in it and let the children bat it backwards and forwards. On a similar theme a bicycle pump or car tyre pump could lead to talking about inflating tyres. The word pneumatic referring to tyres comes from the same source (Pneuma) as is referenced in the passages from John and Acts. Pneuma being the breath or wind or Spirit. The theme of the Birthday party of the Church could include this idea of balloons.

From Sermons4kids.com I have a balloon for each of you. I want you to take the balloon and -- as you breathe life into it -- remember that just as the balloon needs to be filled to be what it was intended to be, you and I need the Holy Spirit to fill us so that we can be all that God wants us to be.

Let us pray.

We thank you, Lord God, for sending your Holy Spirit. We thank you for breathing life into the church and we thank you for giving your spirit to all who believe. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.



Musical Suggestions

For Psalm 104

CH4 132 Immortal, invisible

For Acts and John

CH4 194 This is the day

CH4 489 Come down, O Love Divine

CH4 583 Spirit Divine attend our prayers

CH4 594 Come Holy Spirit come

CH4 595 O breath of life, come sweeping through us (Alt Tune: St Clement)

CH4 596 Breathe on me, Breath of God

CH4 600 Spirit of God unseen as the wind

CH4 615 Holy Spirit, ever living

CH4 619 Spirit of the Living God



Additional Resources

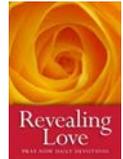
Resourcing Mission



[Resourcing Mission](#) is host to Starters for Sunday and other key mission resources for download and purchase. Online booking is available for [Mission & Discipleship events](#). Please check back regularly, as new items are being added all the time. If there is something you'd like to see on this new site, please [contact us](#) via the website.

Prayer Resources

These materials are designed to be a starting point for what you might look for in prayers. [Pray Now 2013](#) is available now from [St Andrew Press](#). [Revealing Love](#) will be available to purchase from November 2013.



Music Resources

The hymns mentioned in this material are ideas of specific hymns you might choose for this week's themes. However, for some excellent articles on church music and ideas for new music resources, please check out our online music magazine [Different Voices](#).

Preaching Resources



These materials are designed to be a starting point for what you might preach this Sunday. [Preachers Perspectives](#) is a resource where we have asked twelve preachers to share the insights they have gathered through their experiences of writing and delivering sermons regularly.

Scots Worship Resources

[The Kirk's Ear](#) - Scots in the Kirk series for Advent, Christmas, Lent, Easter, Pentecost and other times of the year

[Worship Ouk bi Ouk](#) - Metrical psalms, hymns, prayers and words for worship

[Scots Sacraments](#) may give you helpful material if you are celebrating Communion or have a Baptism.

The Mission and Discipleship Council would like to express its thanks to the Very Rev Bill Hewitt for providing us with this Sunday's material.

Please note that the views expressed in these materials are those of the individual writer and not necessarily the official view of the Church of Scotland, which can be laid down only by the General Assembly.

