

Sunday 31st May 2020

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God is love, let us adore God by sharing God's love.

God is ever present, around us and within us, though separate let us worship together in God.

Hymn

Lead us, heavenly Father, lead us
o'er the world's tempestuous sea;
guard us, guide us, keep us, feed us,
for we have no help but thee;
yet possessing every blessing
if our God our Father be.

Saviour, breathe forgiveness o'er us;
all our weakness thou dost know,
thou didst tread this earth before us,
thou didst feel its keenest woe;
lone and dreary, faint and weary,
through the desert thou didst go.

Spirit of our God, descending,
fill our hearts with heavenly joy,
love with every passion blending,
pleasure that can never cloy:
thus provided, pardoned, guided,
nothing can our peace destroy.

JAMES EDMESTON (1791-1867)

Prayer

Praise to you God, the source of all being, the eternal.

We wonder at your majesty as revealed in the world around us,
we sigh with awe at the splendour that is creation, that is you.

You are present in the light, the water, the clouds, the wind, the sun,
your creative order sets the world along its path.

Light is the power of all life,

But water is life, crossing the earth like the thread of a tapestry,
a fine silver thread bringing to life the green of creation,
from mountain spring to valley river, from inland lake to ocean,
watering the land and giving life to all plants and creatures.

We are water.

Creation feeds and fuels us,
sprout and shrub to mighty tree,
bread and wine, oil, and fuel,
creation is our home.

Day and night,
light and dark,
spring, summer autumn winter,
a harmony of creation woven in time,
land and sea a harmony of environment.

God your creation is life and is living.
The pattern of creation creating the pattern of our days.
Creation's eternal glory offered in love.

Loving God we praise you, the source of all being.
May we live in harmony within the pattern of creation,
respecting and cherishing the foundation of all life,
loving and living within your being, for ever.
The Lord's prayer

Readings Acts 2:1-21
 1 Corinthians 12:3b - 13

Hymn O Breath of life, come sweeping through us,
 revive your Church with life and power;
 O Breath of life, come, cleanse, renew us,
 and fit your Church to meet this hour.

 O Wind of God, come, bend us, break us,
 till humbly we confess our need;
 then in your tenderness remake us,
 revive, restore; for this we plead.

 O Breath of love, come, breathe within us
 renewing thought and will and heart;
 come, love of Christ, afresh to win us,
 revive your Church in every part.

BESSIE PORTER HEAD (1850-1936) alt

Reflection

Pentecost, a celebration, a festival, Jewish and Christian. Every year we celebrate Pentecost in the Christian Church, it is known as the birthday of the church, the moment when the disciples 'connected' with the Spirit in a new and exciting way which gave them confidence to carry on their mission to share the message of Jesus.

As I read Acts 2 again this year I was struck by the similarities to where we find ourselves today. We are locked down, 'hiding', and the church as we have known it is facing a new beginning. As those first disciples made their way with their message, they attracted attention and drew in many who had not been interested before that point. The church grew as small groups met together for prayer, fellowship, and study. Many of our churches are small groups but we carry the weight of organisation, doctrine and creed and we have become inaccessible to many through the sense that what we do is irrelevant to the modern world.

This Pentecost is different. We cannot meet together in the way we have habitually done and yet many will access the message through online worship. People who have never been to church in their lives, people who stopped attending formal church because it ceased to offer what they needed or were looking for, people who are curious or searching. This is Pentecost, a new beginning. We believe the Spirit is available to all, it is the connection between all of creation, but there are many who have never heard or simply don't recognise the concept of that connection. Our challenge as church is the same as it has always been, to explore our connection with God, to build that connection so that we can begin to express life in the fullness of our humanity and thus enable others to become aware of the difference it makes to life when you live in connection. The message of Jesus was simple, every human is worthy, is loved and there is nothing in all creation that can separate them from the love that is God. The message of Pentecost is that when we live fully in

this belief and accept the connection that is Spirit we see the world through different eyes and we see each other through different eyes. There are many stories within the gospels of Jesus healing sight, and Pentecost was a mass expression of healing sight – suddenly the disciples saw it, and through them and their witness others came to see it also.

Lockdown has been horrid, we are all feeling isolated and frustrated and yet we know it is the only way to deal with the threat from the virus. Lockdown has also fuelled innovation and out of necessity forced us to explore new ways of connecting with each other. Few of us like new ways, the unfamiliar feels all wrong and yet throughout the 20th Century we faced change after change in how we live, many changes bringing hope in the form of innovative health techniques, other changes relate to holidays and food, the way we educate children changed dramatically in the sixties, and yet on the whole the way we have done church has changed little over the same timescale. Now it has, and we are seeing people connecting with the message of Jesus in new ways. As we move forward, we know deep down that things will never be the same again; even when Lockdown is over, we will face restrictions on how we meet together for months, maybe even years. However, it is not all negative, we are a creative people, and we will use our creativity to explore a new way of being church.

Reading the familiar passage from 1 Corinthians I ask myself what will our spiritual gifts look like in the new normal? I don't have the answer yet but I look forward to the discussion, recognising that these spiritual gifts focus on communication, which is at the heart of our challenges. As I read the other passage for this Sunday, from John 20, I was equally struck by verse 23, "If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained." This has always been a bit scary, the implied power a bit frightening, but looking at it in the context of new sight I recognised something – forgiveness is about letting go. It is always difficult to let go, and yet unless we let go, we cannot grow. In any situation of hurt if we cannot let go of our need to blame someone we will carry that hurt around; if we cannot let go of the ill feeling it will continue to distort relationships; if we cannot let go for our need for revenge and retribution then we cannot truly love the other. Letting go is at the heart of the gospel, let go of the things that are preventing you from connecting with God, creation and each other. Jesus observed that the way of the temple was getting in the way, it was making it too difficult for people to connect with God, indeed the Temple structures were about preventing people from connecting with God which was seen as the preserve of the Leaders. The leaders did not want to let go, and we know the story from there. Perhaps we are seeing the message that the way we were doing church was preventing many for accessing the message and now we are seeing new possibilities.

Are we prepared to let go and explore something new? Is it time to let go of some assumptions about how we are church to enable new ways to flourish whilst the essential that binds us remains constant – love for one another? As communities we have risen to the challenge of caring for one another, we have seen and read of amazing care systems in neighbourhoods and rural communities, the trend for fragmentation in community has been stalled and a new feeling has arisen. Let us embrace this opportunity as churches to explore the re-birth of the church in the Spirit, using new gifts of communication to reach out into the whole world with the message of hope and love that we know binds us together. Amen

Prayers

Prayer for Pentecost

Previous knowledge coalesces

in an erupting vapour

not dissimilar to a firework display.

Thoughts unrecognised become clear

in an evolving moment of knowing.

Crowds, voices

fade into an eerie silence
only to be replaced
by words spoken from deep within;
Sentence by sentence
cosmic knowledge unfolds
in a tumultuous outpouring
of full humanity and oneness.

Eternal God,
When we choose to hide away, afraid,
shock us;
join the dots of our fragmented vision
that we may be released from fear
into the wonder of love.
With a cascade of spiritual fireworks
illuminate the signs of the kingdom
in the world around us
and lead us out into a new way
of freedom and love for all your people.
May love be our courage and love be the key
to living life in all its fullness,
living as one with you and all people
learning to live in the power of the spirit
which is the knowledge of love.

Prayers for the world

Eternal God, in the midst of despair you offer hope.

Around the world people are grieving, hurting and crying may they sense your presence, know your love which is always with them, and find comfort in the knowledge that all will be well. Things will change and new ways will have to be embraced but in you there is always a new way and that is our hope.

Around the world people are hungry and afraid because they have no money, and there is no food. In our own communities more and more people are facing food poverty. We pray for those who are working to make change a reality, for those who continue to work with food banks and food charities to support vulnerable families. Even in our lockdown may we find ways of offering practical support wherever we can as a message of hope in the face of despair.

Around the world millions face the challenge of homelessness, without the promise of work many are finding it more and more difficult to retain a roof over their head. We pray for new initiatives to help those who find themselves homeless, new initiatives to prevent people losing their homes as a result of lockdown, we pray for those charities which are reaching out to the homeless offering solutions and hope in the midst of despair.

Around the world millions are lonely, isolated in lockdown or in the effect of mental health issues made worse by lockdown. We pray for those who care for people with such issues, for charities which seek to raise awareness of such issues, and as church we pray that we can find ways in the future to be providers of companionship.

Loving God, in you we are one, may our lives reflect that oneness and the message of Jesus. Amen.

Our offering to God.

As we continue to worship apart but together, let us pledge our commitment to sharing in the work of our church by continuing to send our offering and exploring new ways of living generously, and may we know God's blessing on all we do. Amen

Hymn

One in body, one in mind, *Tune – Spirit of the living God*

all are loved and free.

Together in the Spirit now,
we the future see.

Startled, timid,

Nurtured, gifted.

We can build a new church now,
born of ministry.

Gifts are given from within,
blossoming with love,
seeded from creation's core,
flying like a dove.

Knowledge, speaking,
wisdom, healing.

Gifts to build community,
gifts to nurture love.

One in body, one in mind,
Forgiving, letting go
all that holds us separate
and prevents us grow.

Inspired, infused,
released, enthused.

To the future now we look,
confidently so.

We can build a new church here,
using all our gifts.

We can nurture a new way,
growing as we give.

Boldly, strongly,

humbly, justly

Showing God in all we do
as the future shifts.

Heather Whyte 2020

Blessing

May the blessing that is the knowledge of God, source of all being, the love of God discovered through Jesus and the inspiration of the Spirit which binds us together be with us on our journey this day and every day. Amen.