

Pentecost May 23 2021

Call to Worship: Ephesians 2:19-22

You are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.

HYMN StF 11 Holy, holy, holy <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M5OI4f605as>

1
Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty!
Early in the morning our song shall rise to thee:
holy, holy, holy, merciful and mighty,
God in three Persons, blessed Trinity!

2
Holy, holy, holy! All the saints adore thee,
casting down their golden crowns around the
glassy sea;
cherubim and seraphim falling down before thee,
who wert, and art, and evermore shalt be.

3
Holy, holy, holy! Though the darkness hide thee,
though the sinful human eye thy glory may not see,
only thou art holy; there is none beside thee,
perfect in power, in love, and purity.

4
Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty!
All thy works shall praise thy name
in earth and sky and sea;
holy, holy, holy, merciful and mighty,
God in three Persons, blessed Trinity!

Reginald Heber (1783–1826) (alt.) Based on Revelation 4:8-11

PRAYERS OF APPROACH AND CONFESSION

Approach:

Almighty God, we praise you for the promise that you would pour out your Spirit upon all flesh, that creative and life giving Spirit by which you breathed life into the dry bones of our being, that Spirit which blows where it wills, giving gifts to men and planting its fruit within our hearts. As we remember how your Spirit came on the day of Pentecost we praise you that you still come to inspire and to empower. So fill our hearts with love of you that we may worship you in spirit and in truth, giving glory to your most precious name.

Confession:

Father, you breathe new hope, new faith, new life into your people, yet so often the coming of your Spirit is met by unbelief, even ridicule. Your disciples were even accused of being drunk. Forgive our unbelief, take away the barriers we place in our hearts and minds, to resist the coming of your Spirit. Help us always to test the spirit to make sure that it is from you and fill us with all the fullness of your life.

Collect:

Almighty God, who on this day did open the way of eternal life to every race and nation by the promised gift of your Holy Spirit: Spread abroad this gift throughout the world by the preaching of the Gospel, that it may reach to the ends of the earth; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. And who taught us when we pray together to say...

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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 debts as we forgive our debtors, and lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil, for thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory, forever.

Junior Church Address, Followed by Prayer

Today in Junior Church we will be hearing the story of Pentecost.

Let us pray....Dear God

Where there are families in distress, we pray for your peace.

In the playground or park, where children fight or disagree, we pray for your peace.

Where people are cross, worried or anxious, we pray for your peace.

Dear God, give us your peace and make us peacemakers.

Amen.

Junior Church HYMN StF 404 God's Spirit is in my heart

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LtKJBX7oHIY>

- 1 God's spirit is in my heart ;
he has called me and set me apart.
This is what I have to do,
what I have to do :

*He sent me to give the good news to the poor,
tell prisoners that they are prisoners no more,
tell blind people that they can see,
and set the down-trodden free,
and go tell everyone
the news that the kingdom of God has come ;
and go tell everyone
the news that God's kingdom has come.*

- 2 Just as the Father sent me,
so I'm sending you out to be
my witness throughout the world —
the whole of the world :
- 3 Don't carry a load in your pack ;
you don't need two shirts on your back ;
God's workers can earn their own keep —
can earn their own keep :
- 4 Don't worry what you have to say ;
don't worry, because on that day
God's spirit will speak in your heart —
will speak in your heart :

v. 1 and refrain Alan T. Dale (1902-1979)

vv. 2-4 Hubert Richards (b.1921)

Junior Church Blessing

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READING: Ezekiel 37:1-14 The Valley of Dry Bones

¹ The hand of the LORD was on me, and he brought me out by the Spirit of the LORD and set me in the middle of a valley; it was full of bones. ² He led me back and forth among them, and I saw a great many bones on the floor of the valley, bones that were very dry. ³ He asked me, "Son of man, can these bones live?"

I said, "Sovereign LORD, you alone know."

⁴ Then he said to me, "Prophecy to these bones and say to them, 'Dry bones, hear the word of the LORD! ⁵ This is what the Sovereign LORD says to these bones: I will make breath enter you, and you will come to life. ⁶ I will attach tendons to you and make flesh come upon you and cover you with skin; I will put breath in you, and you will come to life. Then you will know that I am the LORD.'"

⁷ So I prophesied as I was commanded. And as I was prophesying, there was a noise, a rattling sound, and the bones came together, bone to bone. ⁸ I looked, and tendons and flesh appeared on them and skin covered them, but there was no breath in them.

⁹ Then he said to me, "Prophecy to the breath; prophecy, son of man, and say to it, 'This is what the Sovereign LORD says: Come, breath, from the four winds and breathe into these slain, that they may live.'" ¹⁰ So I prophesied as he commanded me, and breath entered them; they came to life and stood up on their feet—a vast army.

¹¹ Then he said to me: "Son of man, these bones are the people of Israel. They say, 'Our bones are dried up and our hope is gone; we are cut off.' ¹² Therefore prophecy and say to them: 'This is what the Sovereign LORD says: My people, I am going to open your graves and bring you up from them; I will bring you back to the land of Israel. ¹³ Then you, my people, will know that I am the LORD, when I open your graves and bring you up from them. ¹⁴ I will put my Spirit in you and you will live, and I will settle you in your own land. Then you will know that I the LORD have spoken, and I have done it, declares the LORD.'"

READING: John 15:26 - 16:15 The work of the Holy Spirit

²⁶ "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. ²⁷ And you also must testify, for you have been with me from the beginning.

¹ "All this I have told you so that you will not fall away. ² They will put you out of the synagogue; in fact, the time is coming when anyone who kills you will think they are offering a service to God. ³ They will do such things because they have not known the Father or me. ⁴ 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, ⁵ but now I am going to him who sent me. None of you asks me, 'Where are you going?' ⁶ Rather, you are filled with grief because I have said these things. ⁷ 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. ⁸ When he comes, he will prove the world to be in the wrong about sin and righteousness and judgment: ⁹ about sin, because people do not believe in me; ¹⁰ about righteousness, because I am going to the Father, where you can see me no longer; ¹¹ and about judgment, because the prince of this world now stands condemned.

¹² "I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear. ¹³ 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. ¹⁴ He will glorify me because it is from me that he will receive what he will make known to you. ¹⁵ 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."

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Optional HYMN StF 20 Be still <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aJz2rFc0lw>

- 1 Be still,
for the presence of the Lord,
the Holy One, is here ;
come bow before him now
with reverence and fear :
in him no sin is found —
we stand on holy ground.
Be still,
for the presence of the Lord,
the Holy One, is here.
- 2 Be still,
for the glory of the Lord
is shining all around ;
he burns with holy fire,
with splendour he is crowned :
how awesome is the sight —
our radiant King of light !
Be still,
for the glory of the Lord
is shining all around.
- 3 Be still,
for the power of the Lord
is moving in this place ;
he comes to cleanse and heal,
to minister his grace :
no work too hard for him —
in faith receive from him.
Be still,
for the power of the Lord
is moving in this place.

David J. Evans (b.1957)

HYMN StF 394 Spirit of God, unseen as the wind

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qywGaKEM2IA>

*Spirit of God, unseen as the wind,
gentle as is the dove,
teach us the truth and help us believe,
show us the Saviour's love.*

- 1 You spoke to us long, long ago,
gave us the written word ;
we read it still, needing its truth,
through it God's voice is heard.
- 2 Without your help we fail our Lord,
we cannot live his way ;
we need your power, we need your strength,
following Christ each day.

Margaret V. Old

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Sermon

Said Jesus to Nicodemus, “The wind blows where it chooses, you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes.” If it’s a strong westerly you’d certainly have heard it whistling through the window frames in one of the manses we lived in! But the point Jesus is making is that the Spirit of God is like the wind. You can see its effect but you can’t pin it down or fully understand its coming or going.

Interestingly the word for ‘wind’ is the same as that for ‘spirit’. In the Old Testament that word is ‘ruach’. Thus we read that during the process of creation the ‘Ruach’ of God, the Spirit of God, moved upon the deep, or as a modern translation puts it, “a wind from God swept over the face of the waters.” So too we learn that when God formed man from the dust of the earth, he breathed into his nostrils the breath of life. The word again is ‘ruach’, which can mean ‘wind’, ‘breath’ or ‘spirit’.

And so when we read the account of the Valley of Dry Bones in the book of Ezekiel we can better understand the verse, “Prophecy to the wind...let winds come from every quarter and breathe into these slain, that they may come to life.” Another translation says, “Prophecy to the breath...” Why? Because the word means ‘breath, wind or spirit’. And the point is that it is only by the breath, wind or spirit of God that life can be breathed into the dry bones of our being and make them live.

The same is true in the New Testament. One word can be translated ‘wind’, ‘breath’ or ‘spirit’. That word is ‘pneuma’, from which we get the terms ‘pneumatic tyres’ and ‘pneumatic drill’. It’s the word behind the saying of Jesus to Nicodemus, “The wind blows where it chooses...” and it’s used by Luke in his account of the Day of Pentecost when we read of a noise that sounded like a strong driving wind – note there was no wind, just the sound – and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit. Wind of God, Breath of God, Spirit of God, all synonyms for the same thing and our final hymn this morning will make great use of that fact.

Today is Pentecost Sunday. The day when we remember how the promised Spirit of God descended upon the church in fulfilment, so Peter tells us, of the words of the prophet Joel, “I will pour out my Spirit on all mankind.” John’s account of the coming of the Spirit is far less dramatic. Having recorded Jesus promise that he would send another counsellor, a comforter, an advocate, he, in one short verse tells us that ‘He (Jesus) breathed on them, saying, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit!’ (John 20:22).

It would be true to say that there are a few topics that many ministers treat with kid gloves. And this is one of them. And the reason is because there are widely different theologies surrounding the Spirit, strongly held beliefs and convictions that only a fool would rush to challenge. Then there are the extremes. The one almost ignoring the third person of the godhead altogether and almost quenching the Spirit and the other elevating the Spirit to such an extent that it borders on false teaching and unhealthy practices. Indeed that’s why we hear so much about the Spirit and spiritual gifts in Paul’s letters to the Corinthians. Paul was trying to stamp out false doctrine and bad practice in that church!

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Now let me give you but two examples of Churches where the Spirit IS acknowledged but which vary greatly in practice. The first is the church I was brought up in, the Christian Brethren. Their Sunday morning worship is a Spirit led service as they gather around the Lord's Table for what they often refer to as 'The Breaking of Bread Service'. They sit, in silent prayer waiting for the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and as each is inspired a hymn will be chosen and sung, extempore prayers are said, a passage or two from the Bible will be chosen and read, a short message or homily will be shared, until it is felt time to break bread and share wine. Any male member may rise at any point during the service and take part, and the most important part of the service, the breaking of bread, can be initiated by anyone. There is no pre-planning, no order of service or any agreement as to who will do what. It is a Spirit led service.

However, the Dispensational Theology which underpins Brethren belief assigns the spiritual gifts that Paul talks about in 1 Corinthians 12, things like prophesying, working of miracles, tongues and so on to a bygone dispensation. They, these gifts, Dispensational Theology claims, filled the gap between the coming of the Spirit and the establishment of a Canon of Scripture and are therefore not relevant to the church today. Many in the Brethren would not necessarily agree with this last statement but what they are doing, probably completely unconsciously, is altering the Dispensational Doctrine that underlies their teachings. But if they were like me, pre-theological study, they have probably never even heard the of term 'dispensationalism' and simply believe what they have grown up with.

As the other example, there are churches of every denomination who would not accept a Dispensational understanding of the spiritual gifts and who believe that they are still a vital part of Christian life. Those that emphasise these gifts are often called 'charismatic'. And while I've already mentioned a 'charismatic' church, that at Corinth, and said that it bordered on false teaching and unhealthy practice. I must emphasis that Paul does not deny the existence of spiritual gifts, quite the contrary, but what he does do is try to bring some kind of balance. For example regarding the use of the gift 'glossolalia', commonly known as 'tongues', he says, "I would rather speak five words in a known language than 10,000 in tongues." And the reason is that 'tongues', he tells us is for our own personal edification, whereas speaking in a known tongue or language edifies all.

There's a modern parable told about a Carpenter who left his workshop in the care of his assistants and in leaving gave them many tools and machines that ran on electricity. When he returned he found the machines idle and his electricity used to make the tea, play music, games, films, surf the internet, power treadmills and so on. In other words his assistants were using the power for their own entertainment and benefit while the real work was neglected. You can guess how that one might be interpreted.

The Spirit, of course is not all about power or empowerment, although that is an important aspect of its work. Jesus talks about the Spirit as a Comforter, or Advocate or Helper, literally a 'paraklete', one who comes alongside to help. The Spirit draws us to God, points us to Christ, leads us into all truth, enables us to call God "Abba, Father". Through the Spirit God's love is poured into our hearts, where the fruit of the Spirit is cultivated. It is

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through the working of the Spirit that we are given God's gifts for the building up of the body of Christ, the church. It is the Spirit who fills us with the power and courage to step out in faith and who equips us for service.

In short, as the third person of the Godhead it is the Spirit that mediates God's grace in and towards us. He is, if you like, that part of God who lives with us and in us, as we as individuals and collectively as a church become a dwelling place for God. Relatively few in Old Testament times enjoyed that closeness to God. The Spirit then, came and went at will. But it is our privilege to live post Jesus and the coming of the Spirit at Pentecost, the time when God started to breathe into the dry bones of his peoples' existence giving them new life. As Christ offers each one of us, "I have come that you might have life, and life in all its fullness."

Our final hymn could be said as a prayer. "O Breath of Life, come sweeping through us, revive your Church with life and power." But why would we want a Church revived with life and power? Just so we can enjoy life in all its fullness? Not quite. It's all in the last line: "equip your Church to spread the light."

HYMN StF 338 There is a redeemer <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OdDhy-p8xNM>

- 1 There is a Redeemer,
Jesus, God's own Son,
precious Lamb of God, Messiah,
Holy One.
*Thank you, O my Father,
for giving us your Son,
and leaving your Spirit
till the work on earth is done.*
- 2 Jesus my Redeemer,
name above all names,
precious Lamb of God, Messiah,
O for sinners slain.
- 3 When I stand in glory
I will see his face,
and there I'll serve my King for ever
in that holy place.

vv. 1-2 Melody Green (b.1946)
v. 3 Keith Green (1953-1982)

PRAYERS OF THANKSGIVING AND INTERCESSION

Thanksgiving:

Living and Loving God, we thank you for sending your Spirit to inspire and to empower. We thank you for the gifts that you have given each one of us so that we may build your church up in love. For the fruit of your Spirit which transforms each one of us into the people you would have us be. For the comfort and the council that your Spirit brings, your presence with us and in us, for your glory.

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Intercession:

Father, we pray for church leaders, for all who proclaim your good news, all who minister in your name. May they be filled with your Spirit.

We pray for the nations of the world, for the problems, the misunderstandings, the quarrels, the mistakes and the hurt. May the nation's rulers be influenced by your Holy Spirit.

We pray for peace and for those who strive to be peacemakers. For all engaged in the relief of want and war. May your Spirit empower them.

We pray for this church, for every member, that they together might recognise the gift within them and, in love, build up your witness in this place. Pour out your Spirit upon them and as you poured out your Spirit upon all flesh and gave gifts to men, so may we give, for your glory and for your kingdom in this place.

We pray for those in hospital and those ill at home, for the lonely and the bereaved, those for whom life is hard. May your Spirit comfort them.

We offer you these prayers for the sake of your Son, our Saviour, Jesus Christ. **Amen**

HYMN StF 391 O breath of God (Singing verses 1 – 3 only)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mkebw00jqim>

- 1 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.
- 2 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.
- 3 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.
- 4 Revive us, Lord! Is zeal abating
While harvest fields are vast and ripe?
Revive us, Lord, the world is waiting,
Equip Your church to spread the light.

Elizabeth Ann Head (Bessie Porter Head) (1850–1936)

Blessing

May the Spirit comfort you and make you strong,
may he discipline you gently when you're wrong.
In your heart may he give you a song,
And the blessing of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit be with you this day and evermore.
Amen