

**Tamworth City Uniting Church**

**Worship for Sunday 31<sup>st</sup> May 2020**

## **CELEBRATING PENTECOST**



### **Acknowledgement of Country**

As you enter this time of worship please acknowledge the custodianship of this land by the Kamilaroi peoples - the traditional owners of this land and pay respect to their elders – past, present and emerging.

### **Today is Pentecost.**

Pentecost was originally an important Jewish festival celebrated fifty days after Passover. It was a harvest festival. Named *The Feast of Weeks*, it was a time to give thanks to God for the first wheat harvest of the year and to offer back in thanksgiving, the first fruits of the earth.

### **Call to Worship**

God says: I will pour out my Spirit on all people.  
**Today, we celebrate God's Spirit with us!**

Christ says: I will ask the Father and he will give you another counsellor  
to be with you forever.

**Today, we celebrate God's Spirit with us!**  
This day God's Spirit is with us ... gentle as a dove,  
burning as fire, powerful as the wind.

## Prayer

Breathe your vivid life into our life, generous God.  
Colour our horizons with the rays of your new ideas as we worship you this day.  
Speak to us in ways which cut through any fears and doubts  
and light – deep within us, a passion to be your people.

### **Song** *All things praise you Lord most high*

All things praise you, Lord most high, heaven and earth, and sea and sky;  
all were for your glory made, that your greatness thus displayed  
should all worship bring to you: so we praise you, Lord, anew.

All things praise you – night to night sings in silent hymns of light;  
all things praise you – day by day chants your power in burning ray;  
time and space are praising you: so we praise you, Lord, anew.

All things praise you, glorious Lord, great creator, powerful Word,  
omnipresent Spirit, now at your feet we humbly bow,  
lift our hearts in praise to you: so we praise you, Lord, anew.

TiS 148 George William Conder. Public Domain

## Pentecost Prayer

Holy, sprightly Spirit of God, we delight at your dancing among us,  
filling the world with joyful possibility, revealing the music of the Creator.  
We rejoice at your daring spontaneity and find ourselves  
caught off guard by your unexpected communications.

In a world that can seem predictable, you spark into being new possibilities:  
you gently purge our sin in the warmth of your breath,  
freeing us from our bondage to past wrong.

In a world that can seem to drag,  
you weave your ever-changing patterns into the fabric of our beings.

In a world that can be hostile,  
your mediating love builds a path from loneliness to conviviality,  
from antagonism to co-operation.

In a world that can appear purposeless,  
your vitality shouts out a mighty 'Yes' to life and declares the  
source of all living to be the One from whom you proceed,  
the Father and Mother, Creator and Lover of all.

We make our prayer in the name of Jesus, who promised your coming  
and reigns with you in the eternal fellowship of the Creator,  
one perfect Trinity of love.

John McLuckie. From *Fire and Bread*, ed. Ruth Burgess, Wild Goose Publications

**Song** *O Holy Spirit*

O Holy Spirit, power of God's creation,  
hope of the world, the Christian's inspiration,  
spark deep within us fires of re-creation;  
Spirit, renew us.

Creative Spirit, wake us to each other;  
with your caresses touch us as a lover  
that in your presence we may hold each other;  
Spirit, renew us.

O Holy Spirit – in your life awaking,  
our life hid in you, in your power partaking –  
let your transforming breath, our torpor shaking,  
come and renew us.

Come then, O Spirit, help us share the vision  
of all creation healed of its division,  
in God united and in Christ forgiven;  
Spirit, renew us.

Tune: TiS 246. David Fox, from *'Fire and Bread'*, ed. Ruth Burgess, Wild Goose Publications

**A Reading from the book of The Acts of the Apostles** *Acts 2:1-21*

<sup>2</sup> When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. <sup>2</sup> And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. <sup>3</sup> Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. <sup>4</sup> All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.

<sup>5</sup> Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. <sup>6</sup> And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each. <sup>7</sup> Amazed and astonished, they asked, "Are not all these who are speaking Galileans?" <sup>8</sup> And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language? <sup>9</sup> Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, <sup>10</sup> Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, <sup>11</sup> Cretans and Arabs—in our own languages we hear them speaking about God's deeds of power." <sup>12</sup> All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, "What does this mean?" <sup>13</sup> But others sneered and said, "They are filled with new wine."

<sup>14</sup> But Peter, standing with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed them, "Men of Judea and all who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and listen to what I say. <sup>15</sup> Indeed, these are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only nine o'clock in the morning. <sup>16</sup> No, this is

what was spoken through the prophet Joel:

<sup>17</sup> 'In the last days it will be, God declares,  
that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh,  
and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,  
and your young men shall see visions,  
and your old men shall dream dreams.

<sup>18</sup> Even upon my slaves, both men and women,  
in those days I will pour out my Spirit;  
and they shall prophesy.

19 And I will show portents in the heaven above  
and signs on the earth below,  
blood, and fire, and smoky mist.  
20 The sun shall be turned to darkness  
and the moon to blood,  
before the coming of the Lord's great and glorious day.  
21 Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.'

### **The Message**

As far as drama goes, today's story from Acts has it all:

Lots of people, wind and flames, a babble of languages and a 'no holds barred' speech. It's great drama.

There was, probably, some historical event that Luke drew upon. The Rev Bill Loader, a suggests that 'It is entirely credible that The Feast of Weeks, which the Jews celebrated fifty days after Passover and, more particularly, after Jesus' execution and his disciples' acclamation of his resurrection, would have been a special occasion for the fledgling Christian community. Perhaps there was some event amid the crowd. Perhaps there was some experience which those who believed saw as an outpouring of the Spirit.' Luke is hardly likely to have dreamt up the occasion from probabilities.

Whatever the event, Luke's story uses rich symbolism to get his point across

Luke's account is dramatic – indeed it could be said to be over the top!

We have a heavenly sound like that of a rushing, violent wind. The imagery of wind reflects the word for Spirit, which in both Hebrew and Greek, means wind, breath and Spirit.

Then there is descending fire, appearing as tongues of flame which hovered over people's heads. Again a comment from the Rev Bill Loader: 'The Feast of Weeks which the Jews celebrated fifty days after Passover, was also a time to celebrate the coming of the divine Law on Sinai. Legend has it that on that occasion a flame came down from heaven and divided into 79 tongues of fire, one for each nation of the world. All could understand, but only one nation promised to keep the Law – Israel.'

Then we have patterns of transformed speech allowing everyone to understand what was being said in all kinds of languages. What a cacophony! So much so that some people in the crowd thought that they were drunk!

Finally, a humdinger of a sermon – drawn from the prophet Joel, was preached by Peter who attributed it all to God's Spirit being poured forth.

All this is told by Luke to point to the gift of God's Spirit to those first disciples.

Successive generations of disciples have looked upon this event as the day the church came into being.

How do you think of God's Spirit? Take a moment to think about this.

As I was pondering this question the other day for myself, I reflected that my earliest memories of being taught about God's Spirit was to look upon it as a dove which brings peace. I remember there was a picture hanging in one of the Sunday School rooms of a lovely white dove – wings outstretched, heading downwards.

There's a lot to be said for the dove as being symbolic of God's Spirit.

In the story of the flood in Genesis, it was a dove bearing an olive branch that flew back to Noah, signalling the good news of dry land.

In Luke's account of Jesus baptism the Spirit of God descended upon him in bodily form like a dove.

A nice white dove also suggests innocence, purity and peace. It is gentle, graceful, and seductive ..... but there's another side to God's Spirit as witnessed to by our reading from Acts. A side that is anything but peaceful or gentle.

It has been suggested that in old Celtic traditions, the Holy Spirit was not represented as a white dove, but by a wild goose.

Geese are not controllable. They make a lot of noise and they have a habit of biting those who try to contain them.

Geese fly faster in a flock than on their own and they make excellent 'guard dogs'.

There's no evidence to substantiate such a tradition in Celtic folklore, but looking at God's Spirit in this way is, I believe, helpful.

If we think of the Spirit of God as being like a 'wild goose', we might say the following about it:

It comes not in quiet conformity, but demanding to be heard.

Its song is not always sweet to everyone.

It drives people together, demanding they support and travel with one another.

It shouts a truth many with power would rather not hear.

And it often forces those on whom it rests, to become noisy, passionate, and courageous people of the gospel.

If we think of the Spirit in this way then it is not something that we can control. Nor is it something that will allow us to go along in the same old way.

Sometimes it might disturb us from our torpid slumbers.

At other times it will lead us and guide us into new ways of being.

At still other times we might find that it demands that we work hard together to sort things out.

It might - at those times when we are hesitant, give us the courage to live the kingdom life that God calls us to.

God's Spirit will blow when and where and in whomever it wants.

We can ignore it, or we can let ourselves be taken on a journey that will deepen our relationship with each other and with God.

The apostle Paul got it right when he said that the sign of the presence of the Holy Spirit is love - not the love sold to us by sappy films and books, but the love of God which is the fellowship of the Holy Spirit.

A Spirit that binds different and unlikely people together, creating a new community which seeks to be inclusive, justice seeking and compassionate. A community that seeks to live the kingdom life that Jesus did.

Pentecost could be said to be a wild goose - represented by the whistle blower, the meals-on-wheels provider, the hospital visitor, the activists for climate change reforms, those who stand up for and support refugees and asylum seekers, and those seeking welfare and education reform, and employment opportunities for all.

It is not surprising that as we celebrate the coming of the Spirit of God at Pentecost, our biblical reading has nothing to say about the innocence, purity and peace so often associated with the Spirit as dove.

On the contrary, this Spirit is the living energy, the creative vitality that stirs the waves and whispers in the wind, that warms the sun, that vibrates in the sounds of nature, begetting novelty in every realm of the universe.

And part of that realm is us: both individually and collectively as a community of faith.

The spirit of Pentecost is the living energy within us.

So let us continue to embrace new and different ways of worshipping and thinking, so that we might reflect the challenging and unique diversity of the Creator God in the world.

As we celebrate together, care for one another, push theological boundaries, and go about the life of this congregation in new ways, let's celebrate the Spirit of play and wonder.

And finally, let us continue to embrace the dreams and visions of the future which we believe makes our congregation both unique and important.

We've been marking time over the past three months as we've battled with the challenges of lockdown.

As we slowly come out of that lockdown we might be tempted to go back to the way things were – to rest in nostalgia, to seek the safety of the known.

But that's not what Pentecost is about.

Pentecost is something much more than a past event.

It is the story of God's continuing present-ness, experienced again and again.

It's the amazing story of people coming to awareness, through reflecting on the life of Jesus, that the same Spirit that moved in him moved in them.

May we, Jesus' modern day disciples experience that same Spirit as we dream dreams and seek a vision of love, justice and compassion in the world.

### **Affirmation of Faith**

God, creator of the world,  
creator of light and life, love and hope,  
we believe in you.

Jesus, revealer of your father,  
you brought light into places of darkness.  
You brought light into lives filled with fear.  
You brought love into places where there was only fear and rejection,  
we believe in you.

Holy Spirit,  
you act today shedding light into those corners of the world  
where there is seemingly, endless darkness.  
You pierce through the gloom  
with messages of hope and encouragement.  
You act in people's lives enabling them to become  
the bearers of light and life, love and generosity,  
we believe in you.

Betty Stroud, 2016

### **Prayers of the People**

*(Contributed by Robyn Hely)*

God you call us to be your people, and that is who we are. You blow through our lives like a rushing wind or a gentle breeze, waking us to the amazing possibilities that life has to offer in serving others in your name.

As the early Christians gathered together, waiting with expectant hope, the promises of Jesus, the Holy Spirit settled on them, filling them with all manner of emotions of hope and joy. We have not been able to gather as a Christian family, but still we have been filled with your Holy Spirit. Even in this time of uncertainty, we know that you have been with us.

Thank you for guiding us through our fears in our isolation, especially for those who are by themselves. Thank you for the wonder of technology that has enabled people to stay in touch.

We pray for the many who have lived with the fear of catching the coronavirus, especially those in isolation and the elderly, even those in care. Many families have found great joy in spending time together once again, doing the simple things, sharing chores, cooking and improvising entertainment. We pray that they may continue to enjoy this closeness as their world opens up again. May kindness and love flow in the workplace and school. We especially pray for those who have suffered during this time. Those who have lost loved ones, not being able to grieve properly with family and friends. Those who were already living in unhappy households, who have had to endure more hardships bringing up children in unstable relationships.

As we slowly emerge from our isolation, may your Holy Spirit fill us with hope in the future. A future where we care more about each other and our world. Your gift of love is infused in us by the Holy Spirit. Love unites. Love is a common language among all people no matter the creed or colour of their skin.

Holy Spirit, rushing wind, we pray for our community in this place and beyond. We bring before you asylum seekers, living in uncertainty, homeless people, all who suffer illness of body and mind friends, colleagues, neighbours and families and pray that in our loving , we may speak the language of love in places of sadness, loneliness and despair .We give thanks for all those who have worked tirelessly during this crisis - health workers, teachers, ministers and our country's leaders. We pray that their health will not suffer as they continue to work for our good.

Jesus, you shape us to be your people, for that is who we are. Your stories show us what it means to care for people, to look around and cry out against all that is wrong in the world, to be loving, kind, generous compassionate and joyful. We can only do this if you are within us and we in you. Enfold us in your love always. We ask these things in your precious name.

Amen.

**Song**    *Come Holy Spirit, come*

Come, Holy Spirit, come! In flame our souls with love,  
transforming every heart and home with wisdom from above.  
O let us not despise the humble path Christ trod,  
but choose, to shame the worldly-wise, the foolishness of God.

Come with the gift to heal the wounds of guilt and fear,  
and to oppression's face reveal the kingdom drawing near.  
Where chaos longs to reign, descend, O holy dove,  
and free us all to work again the miracles of love.

Spirit of truth, arise; inspire the prophet's voice:  
expose to scorn the tyrant's lies, and bid the poor rejoice.

O Spirit, clear our sight, all prejudice remove,  
and help us to discern the right, and covet only love.

Give us the tongues to speak, in every time and place,  
To rich and poor, to strong and weak, the word of love and grace.

Enable us to hear the words that others bring,  
Interpreting with open ear the special song they sing.

Come, Holy Spirit, dance within our hearts today,  
our earth-bound spirits to entrance, our mortal fear allay;  
and teach us to desire all other things above,  
that self-consuming holy fire, the perfect gift of love.

## **A Prayer**

Great soaring Spirit sweeping in uncharted flight  
beyond the bound of time and space.  
God's breath of love, you fill the outflung galaxies  
and move through earth's long centuries  
with aching, mending, dancing grace.

Great eagle Spirit, crying from the tallest crags  
to all discarded, all distressed,  
glad gusting love, come, scatter trivialities  
and raise envisioned ministries  
to hear and honour earth's oppressed.

Great nesting Spirit, sheltering with mighty wings  
your chattering, demanding brood,  
deep, restless love, come, stir us, show us how to fly,  
till, heading for tomorrow's sky,  
we soar together, God-renewed.

## **Sending Out and Blessing**

Take the good things of God to all you meet.  
Share yourself with others.  
Share what you have with each other.  
Celebrate the Spirit of God with you and in you and in others.  
Blow God's Spirit of peace gently and wildly into all places.  
Go in the love of God's Spirit.  
And the blessing of God:  
Creator, Son and Holy Spirit  
be with you this day  
and remain with you always.  
Amen!