

# Stokesley Methodist Church



**Sunday 31st May 2020**



*Pentecost*

## **A Gathering Prayer from the Roots resources**

Come, Holy Spirit; fill us with your peace.

Come, Holy Spirit; unite us in our worship.

Come, Holy Spirit; raise us by your power.

Come, Holy Spirit, come now.

Dear Lord, we gather in the name of Jesus and in the power of the Spirit to worship you.

We bring gifts of speaking, of listening, of music, of prayerfulness, of knowledge, and of wisdom.

May our gifts be united to honour you and may each of us receive from you that which we need.

**Amen.**

## **Lectionary Readings:**

**Acts 2 v1-21** (p1093) The Holy Spirit Comes at Pentecost/Peter Addresses the Crowd

**Psalm 104 v24-34, 35b** (p607) How many are your works, O Lord!

**1 Corinthians 12 v3b-13** (p1153) Spiritual Gifts/One Body, Many Parts

**John 7 v37-39** (p1072) Is Jesus the Christ?

## Let Anyone

This week our focus is on the unifying power of the Spirit.

On the day of Pentecost Jesus' disciples experience being filled dramatically with God's Holy Spirit, the culmination of many centuries of waiting for the fulfilment of God's promise, made known through Old Testament prophets.

The miraculous events of the day of Pentecost reflect the stories of long ago: Elijah and the sound of the wind, Moses and the mountain enveloped in smoke and lightning.

But now these elemental experiences have come indoors and the unapproachable has come close. The result is not fear and trembling but communication – speech in many different languages. The message shared is that God has poured out his Spirit upon all people. This includes people who would have been seen as having a low status – such as daughters, women and slaves. In fact, 'slaves' would include foreigners, and so people of other cultures and religions too. The use of the expression 'all flesh' underlines the universality and the importance of this moment. The people in Jerusalem at that time were witnessing the beginning of the fulfilment of the prophecy of Joel.

The passage from 1 Corinthians is not a management strategy for sharing out jobs, but a hymn to unity in diversity. The Holy Spirit

inspires devotion to Jesus and becomes visible in the community as people activate their particular manifestation of the Spirit. Oneness does not come through resembling one another in an exact pattern of service or adhering to a particular church culture. It does not even come from a shared sublime stillness. It comes through a diversity of activity, as people get stuck in, using what they have been given for the common good. Is this a complete inventory of gifts of the Spirit? It is doubtful. The tone of the passage suggests that these are illustrations of diversity, not a tick-box list. Whatever the nature of someone's gift, as a manifestation of the Spirit, it is part of the healthy working of the body and so a sign that makes Christ visible.

The festival mentioned here in John's Gospel is Sukkot, or the Feast of Tabernacles – still celebrated by Jewish people all over the world. It is a festival for remembering the time when the people were wandering in the desert and had no permanent homes, only a makeshift shelter (called a 'sukkah'). It is also an agricultural festival, giving thanks for the autumn harvest. At the time of Jesus, it was one of the three annual pilgrimage festivals when people endeavoured to make the journey to Jerusalem to worship at the Temple. These were Passover, Pentecost (thanksgiving for the wheat harvest and the giving of the Torah) and Sukkot. Jerusalem would have been crowded with pilgrims. There was a special daily ceremony during the festival, celebrating the gift of water. A golden flagon of water was drawn at the Pool of Siloam and taken in solemn procession to the sound of trumpets up to the Temple, to be poured out on the altar. When Jesus cries out, it is in the context of this ceremony. 'Let anyone who is thirsty come to me,' resonates as both prophetic and provocative. Jesus is putting himself forward as the source of living water, overriding the religious ritual surrounding the city's

water pool and the altar in the Temple. This living water is available from him for those willing to believe and to drink, but it will also then flow out of the believer's deepest inner being as a river or fountain. The Scripture being quoted here is not readily identifiable, though it links in a thematic way with verses in Isaiah, eg. Isaiah 55 v1. John's Gospel does not usually present a linear picture of spiritual events, but here the passage ends with a comment explaining that Jesus is talking about the future: the Spirit had not yet been given in this way, because Jesus had not yet been glorified. We know from later chapters in John's Gospel that Jesus is glorified through his cross and resurrection, so it makes sense to place this deep inner experience of the Spirit alongside the specific outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost.

### **The links between the readings**

All these passages contain an invitation to participate. Peter quotes Joel to emphasise that the outpouring of the Spirit has only just begun and will be for 'all flesh'. Paul exhorts his readers to realise that diversity in gifts is not a sign that people who are different are outside God's favour, but rather a sign of the Spirit being made manifest in the world. Jesus calls anyone who is thirsty to come to him and drink.

### **A Sending Out Prayer**

May the power of the Spirit challenge you.

May the peace of the Spirit comfort you.

May the presence of the Spirit enable you to live in love and service in the name of Christ.

**Amen**