

Worship Outline including Reflection for the Feast of Pentecost

Opening Verse of Scripture Psalm 104.26

O Lord, how manifold are your works! In wisdom you have made them all; the earth is full of your creatures.

Collect: Prayer for the Day

Holy Spirit, sent by the Father, ignite in us your holy fire; strengthen your children with the gift of faith, revive your Church with the breath of love, and renew the face of the earth, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

First Reading: Ezekiel 37.1-14

The hand of the Lord came upon me, and he brought me out by the spirit of the Lord and set me down in the middle of a valley; it was full of bones. He led me all round them; there were very many lying in the valley, and they were very dry. 3He said to me, 'Mortal, can these bones live?' I answered, 'O Lord God, you know.' Then he said to me, 'Prophecy to these bones, and say to them: O dry bones, hear the word of the Lord. Thus says the Lord God to these bones: I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live. I will lay sinews on you, and will cause flesh to come upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and you shall live; and you shall know that I am the Lord.' So I prophesied as I had been commanded; and as I prophesied, suddenly there was a noise, a rattling, and the bones came together, bone to its bone. I looked, and there were sinews on them, and flesh had come upon them, and skin had covered them; but there was no breath in them. Then he said to me, 'Prophecy to the breath, prophecy, mortal, and say to the breath: Thus says the Lord God: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live.' I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood on their feet, a vast multitude. Then he said to me, 'Mortal, these bones are the whole house of Israel. They say, "Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost; we are cut off completely." Therefore prophecy, and say to them, Thus says the Lord God: I am going to open your graves, and bring you up from your graves, O my people; and I will bring you back to the land of Israel. And you shall know that I am the Lord, when I open your graves, and bring you up from your graves, O my people. I will put my spirit within you, and you shall live, and I will place you on your own soil; then you shall know that I, the Lord, have spoken and will act, says the Lord.'

Second Reading: Acts 2.1-21

When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. 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. Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. All of them were

filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability. Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each. Amazed and astonished, they asked, 'Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language? Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabs—in our own languages we hear them speaking about God's deeds of power.' All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, 'What does this mean?' But others sneered and said, 'They are filled with new wine.' 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. Indeed, these are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only nine o'clock in the morning. No, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel: "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. Even upon my slaves, both men and women, in those days I will pour out my Spirit; and they shall prophesy. And I will show portents in the heaven above and signs on the earth below, blood, and fire, and smoky mist. The sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood, before the coming of the Lord's great and glorious day. Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved."

Gospel Reading: John 15.26-27, 16.4b-15

'When the Advocate comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who comes from the Father, he will testify on my behalf. You also are to testify because you have been with me from the beginning. But I have said these things to you so that when their hour comes you may remember that I told you about them. 'I did not say these things to you from the beginning, because I was with you. But now I am going to him who sent me; yet none of you asks me, "Where are you going?" But because I have said these things to you, sorrow has filled your hearts. Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Advocate will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you. And when he comes, he will prove the world wrong about sin and righteousness and judgement: about sin, because they do not believe in me; about righteousness, because I am going to the Father and you will see me no longer; about judgement, because the ruler of this world has been condemned. 'I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth;

for he will not speak on his own, but will speak whatever he hears, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me, because he will take what is mine and declare it to you. All that the Father has is mine. For this reason I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you.

Reflection

‘When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth’

Seven weeks after celebrating Easter this weekend we arrive at festival of Pentecost when we remember the giving of the Holy Spirit. This Christian celebration is big, it sits as the third major festival after Easter and Christmas. It is often called the birthday of the church, the time when the Christian Church began. However, this misses a vital point; these early believers were not part of a separate Christian church, they were Jews, firmly rooted in Jewish spirituality. The name Pentecost comes from the Greek word for 50, ‘pente’. The roots of this special time lie in the Jewish Harvest festival, the Festival of Weeks; Shavuot. It celebrated the completion of the Spring or wheat harvest and commemorated the giving of the law to Moses on Mt Sinai.

This is hugely significant. The Old Testament Covenant, established in the Exodus, which the Passover commemorated, was completed at Mt Sinai with the giving of the law. The New Covenant, established in the cross and resurrection was completed in Jerusalem with the giving of the Holy Spirit. What this means is that under the Old Covenant Moses gave the Law on Mt Sinai, and under the New Covenant Jesus gives the Holy Spirit. So now we read that there is a new beginning and there is more fire and there is more noise, this time described like ‘wind’. In Acts, Luke uses phrases such as ‘like the blowing of a violent wind’ and ‘what seemed to be tongues of fire.’ This is poetic speech to use words to point beyond their real meaning to a deeper significance.

We are told that the disciples were able to speak real other languages. Jerusalem was a cosmopolitan place anyway but we know that there were lots of people in Jerusalem because of the harvest feast. The work of the Holy Spirit is seen to bring nations together. When somebody is talking nonsense, we often say that they are ‘babbling’. It refers back to the episode in the Bible in Genesis 11 where the Tower of Babel was built and we are told God broke up the nations and gave them different languages. Now the opposite is happening, God is uniting people. Babel tells of the world being divided; Pentecost of a world being brought together. The disciples all were speaking different languages and people thought they were drunk. The Apostle Peter, seized the opportunity and he reminded the gathered devout Jews about what the prophet Joel had said. He realises that this is a huge moment in God’s history of dealing with humankind and he quotes Joel to describe what new thing God is doing.

So with God's new creation, God's new covenant people, it is going to be different. It has all nations, young people - sons and daughters, old people it is not restricted by gender and there is no social barrier it includes even slaves. We can see what happened as a result of this Pentecost experience. This was a transformation of those disciples. The Twelve go from a defeated, sorry lot of losers to those who tilted the world on its axis. The disciples were dramatically changed and it is this change which speaks so powerfully about the truth of the resurrection of Jesus. May we reflect that dramatic transformation in the way that we live our lives. Amen.

Post Communion Prayer

Faithful God, who fulfilled the promises of Easter by sending us your Holy Spirit and opening to every race and nation the way of life eternal: open our lips by your Spirit, that every tongue may tell of your glory; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.