

# Worship @ Home

Sunday 31<sup>st</sup> May 2020 – Pentecost

Worship Leader: Val Reid

Drop-In Guest: Louise Selby

Reader: Anne Blackman

Music: Michael Crowley

Technician: Tony Edmonds



## ***Call to worship***

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.

## ***Welcome***

A warm welcome to all of you who are joining us this morning.

I know there will be lots of you who are part of the congregations at Christchurch, Pirton, and from round the North Hertfordshire Circuit.

There will be others of you who are joining us for the first time because you have friends or family here, or because you have found our You Tube channel by chance.

You are all most welcome.

It's really good to share this time of worship together.

Today is Pentecost – the birthday of the church.

And this morning we'll be thinking and praying and reflecting together on what this means for us as a church in lockdown!

My name is Val, and I'm the minister at Christchurch Hitchin and at Pirton.

The reader this morning is Anne Blackman.

Mike Crowley is our musician this morning – Mike, we're really glad you have recovered from your back injury last week.

Louise Selby, our Family Worker at Christchurch, will be dropping in to tell us something about what's been going on during family worship earlier this morning.

And very many thanks again to Tony Edmonds – he’s our behind-the scenes producer and technical expert, and this simply couldn’t happen without him!

Our opening hymn is one we love to sing at Christchurch.

It’s about creating a building where everybody feels welcome.

That’s what’s on the board outside the church door – EVERYONE WELCOME.

At the moment we don’t have a building we can use.

We are all still in our own homes, worshipping together through the miracle of technology.

But that spirit of welcoming everybody – the spirit of the first Pentecost – is still something which is important to us as a community of faith.

We’re just doing it a bit differently at the moment!

**Hymn** (StF 409 verses 1-2, 4-5)

Let us build a house where love can dwell

and all can safely live,

a place where saints and children tell

how hearts learn to forgive;

built of hopes and dreams and visions,

rock of faith and vault of grace;

here the love of Christ shall end divisions:

All are welcome, all are welcome,

all are welcome in this place.

Let us build a house where prophets speak,

and words are strong and true,

where all God's children dare to seek

to dream God's reign anew.

Here the cross shall stand as witness

and as symbol of God's grace;

here as one we claim the faith of Jesus:

All are welcome, all are welcome,

all are welcome in this place.

Let us build a house where hands will reach

beyond the wood and stone

to heal and strengthen, serve and teach,

and live the Word they've known.

Here the outcast and the stranger  
bear the image of God's face;  
let us bring an end to fear and danger:  
All are welcome, all are welcome,  
all are welcome in this place.

Let us build a house where all are named,  
their songs and visions heard  
and loved and treasured, taught and claimed  
as words within the Word.  
Built of tears and cries and laughter,  
prayers of faith and songs of grace,  
let this house proclaim from floor to rafter:  
All are welcome, all are welcome,  
all are welcome in this place.

*Marty Haugen (b.1950)*

### **Louise**

**We welcome Louise!**

**Louise will tell us something about what they've been doing in family worship this morning...**

### **Prayers**

**Louise leads us in all-age opening prayers**

We're going to do some interactive prayers. I say "do" them because prayer is more than just our words - we can see and do prayers as well. There will be 5 parts to our prayers. Firstly we will praise God, then we'll say thank you to him. After this we will ask God to meet with us today, then we'll ask him to teach us. Finally we'll ask him to fill us with his Holy Spirit.

Firstly - praise. If you're able, please can you very quickly go and get something that makes you think about God. Or you might prefer to just look at it if you can already see it, or just imagine it. While some of you are off getting your object, I'll show you mine. This is a tree house. When I was very young I used to have nightmares about being chased by a Dalek in

the forest. After I became a Christian I had the same dream, but in it I climbed into the tree and was safe. So I want to praise God that he gives me a safe place from my fears and looks after me

Now, hold or look at your object and tell God how good he is.

Secondly - thanks. Think of something that you are thankful for that has happened this week. Say it aloud, either to someone else, or to yourself, or even send a text message to someone.

Thirdly - meet. Hold your hands together like this (hands in prayer pose). Think about your front door. It's probably closed at the moment. Think about all the people you meet there. Now open your hands (hands either side of your face, palms facing forward) and think about how God wants to meet you right now. Invite him in through the door.

Fourthly - teach. The first step towards being taught is knowing that we don't know it all. Hold your hands out (apart, in front with palms facing upwards) as a sign that God can teach you, then hold your hands to your heart and ask God to help what you learn become part of your life.

Finally - fill. Go and get a glass of water - or your chosen drink! Drink it sip by sip as I pray. Holy Spirit, please fill us afresh today. May we know your help and guidance. Help us to know Jesus and follow him more closely. Amen.

*Amen... Thank you Louise.*

*Anne is going to read to us from the second chapter of Acts.*

**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.”

*Let us pray*

***Prayer of confession***

For the times when I have jumped to conclusions,  
Forgive me.

For the times when I have tried to limit the people who can dream, and prophesy, and see  
visions,  
Forgive me.

For the times when I have failed to recognise the gloriously illogical work of the Spirit,  
Forgive me.

For the times when I have tied you down because your wildness terrified me,  
Forgive me.

*Silence*

*Let anyone who is thirsty come to me  
And let the one who believes in me drink.  
Out of the believer's heart shall flow rivers of living water.  
(John 7: 37-38)*

The Spirit is for you.  
Drink and let your heart be satisfied.  
Drink and let go of your fear.  
God is with you.  
Amen.

### ***Reflection***

I've really been enjoying the manse garden during lockdown.  
I'm so lucky to have a garden, I know!  
I'm growing vegetables, and I have loads of seedlings and cuttings from friends near and far.  
And in order to attract butterflies and other insects, I decided I wanted to create a wildflower meadow (a really tiny wildflower meadow).  
So I haven't mowed the middle of the lawn.  
I've mowed a nice neat path round the edge, as I don't want the neighbours to think I'm just a bit lazy.  
But I've left the middle to grow as it pleases.

It doesn't look anything like a wildflower meadow.  
Yet.  
It just looks like a lawn that hasn't been mowed.  
I've done some research.  
In the Autumn I'll need to cut the grass down (preferably with a scythe!), rake the soil, and scatter some wildflower seeds.  
Perhaps next year it will resemble the beautiful flowery space of my imagination.

But not yet.

If I had a text for this sermon, it would be that one word.

Yet.

We think of Pentecost as the birthday of the church.

And of course, in many ways it is.

We are familiar with the story – the disciples all together in one place (those were the days), the sound like the rush of a violent wind, the tongues of fire, the speaking in other languages...

But this is just part of a much bigger story.

Those disciples who were all together in one place have been on a bit of a roller coaster.

From the excitement of Palm Sunday to the desolation of Gethsemane.

From the agony of the Cross to the confusion and the amazement of the resurrection.

From the post-resurrection conversations and beach barbecues to the final goodbye of the ascension.

From the impatient questions about when, to the committee meeting to appoint a replacement for Judas.

And then, in response to Peter's sermon on the day of Pentecost, three thousand new converts were baptised.

We're given a little snapshot of life among the believers.

Holding all things in common, eating together with glad and generous hearts, praising God, and having the goodwill of all the people.

Yet if this is the blueprint for church – we haven't quite got there yet.

Have we?

Of course – we can't hold anything in common at the moment, or eat together, or meet to praise God.

Because of Coronavirus.

But even two thousand years ago this idyllic picture doesn't last for long.

People start cheating.

Hiding some of their money because holding all things in common is just a bit too radical.

Then there are the arguments about who should be included in the early church.

When God says EVERYONE WELCOME, does he mean everyone?

Literally?

Women?

Slaves?

Gentiles?

This becomes a matter of great debate for Peter and Paul.

We're still debating it today.

Just think back over the narrative of the church during the last two millennia.

Stories of persecution, and official sponsorship.

Stories of growth and decline.

Arguments about doctrine and heresy.

New Pentecostal movements of the Spirit – and the inevitable falling away of enthusiasm.

Last week, on Aldersgate Sunday, we remembered the day when John Wesley's heart was strangely warmed, and his willingness to take the risk of preaching in the open air.

He began the great 18<sup>th</sup> century evangelical revival.

How much of that DNA is still active in the Methodist Church today?

If Acts 2 is our blueprint for church, we are not church ... yet.

But this isn't a message of despair.

Or disillusion.

This isn't a sermon about giving up on project church because we haven't got it right in two thousand years.

It's a sermon about hope.

Because surely the message of Pentecost is that things can and do change.

Sometimes slowly and incrementally.

Sometimes radically and unexpectedly.

Sometimes the work of the spirit is so zany that people think we are drunk.

Sometimes it is a still, small voice that invites us to stop and pay attention to what is already there.

Over the last two months we have learned that we can be church in radically different ways.

Who would have guessed that we could walk out of our buildings and not look back, and find new ways to do community on the phone.

New ways to do worship online.

Who would have guessed we could drop everything at midday to say the Lord's prayer with our scattered community, and 'thy kingdom come' would suddenly become real in my study?

No – we are not the perfect church – yet.

But there is space to grow and learn and change direction.

Perhaps change direction several times.

We are going to have to zig-zag our way through what church might be or could be in the coming weeks and months.

We can't be all together in one place.

But we can pray.

We can listen out for the visions and the dreams and the prophecies that anyone and everyone might share with us as we discern the way forward.

We can allow the noisy, disruptive Spirit to nudge us into new ways of being church.

I think it's exciting.

I think it's inspiring.

Just look at what those eleven disillusioned, dispirited disciples achieved in a single lifetime!

Perhaps I'll even have a wildflower meadow in my back garden next year...

Amen.

### ***Prayers for ourselves and others***

***Using Hymn 'Spirit of God'*** <http://travellinglight.org.uk/song/spirit-of-god/> (© 1999 Paul Arnold)

***We're going to use music and silence and our own breathing to help us pray this morning. Mike will sing one or two verses of Paul's hymn 'Spirit of God', and after each section of music, I will invite you to become aware of your breath, in and out, and to use it as the focus for your prayers.***

Spirit of God, descend we pray  
And lead each one in your true way.  
Help us to hear your still small voice  
Which chides and checks us when we stray.

***Sit very still and become aware of your breathing.  
As you breathe in, think of God.  
As you breathe out, think of the world.***

***Repeat this three times...***

Spirit of peace and gentleness  
That holds and heals those in distress,  
Complete in us that sacred task  
And mend with love our brokenness.

Spirit of joy, heaven's graceful dove,  
That soars through space on wings of love,  
Alight on us, and break the bonds  
Of doubt, and every fear remove.

*As you breathe in now, give thanks for the peace the Spirit brings.  
As you breathe out, pray for peace in the world.*

*Repeat this three times...*

Spirit of hope and holiness  
And self-control and faithfulness,  
Bring us to bear these holy fruits  
That hands may do what hearts confess.

Spirit of power and purity  
Whose loving works we long to see,  
Dispel the fear that holds our hearts  
And nails our Saviour to the tree.

*As you breathe in, receive from God what God has for you.  
As you breathe out, ask what you should do.*

*Repeat this three times...*

Spirit of truth and constancy,  
Who was and is, and is to be,  
Stir up anew within our hearts  
Your fire, eternal one in three.

*Keep a few moments of quiet and conclude:*

Come, Holy Spirit, come now.

**Amen.**

*I invite you now to say the Lord's prayer out loud.*

*Use whichever version you are familiar with.*

*Use whichever language feels like your mother tongue.*

*Although we are apart, we join together in praying the prayer that Jesus gave us.*

Our Father in heaven,  
hallowed be your name,  
your kingdom come,  
your will be done,  
on earth as in heaven.  
Give us today our daily bread.  
Forgive us our sins  
as we forgive those who sin against us.  
Lead us not into temptation  
but deliver us from evil.  
For the kingdom, the power,  
and the glory are yours  
now and for ever.  
Amen.

***Blessing***

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.**

***Hymn*** (StF 477)

*Teach me to dance to the beat of your heart*

*Teach me to move in the power of your Spirit*

*Teach me to walk in the light of your presence  
Teach me to dance to the beat of your heart*

*Teach me to love with your heart of compassion  
Teach me to trust in the word of your promise  
Teach me to hope in the day of your coming  
Teach me to dance to the beat of your heart*

You wrote the rhythm of life  
Created heaven and earth  
In You is joy without measure  
So, like a child in your sight  
I dance to see your delight  
For I was made for your pleasure, pleasure  
*Teach me to dance to the beat of your heart...*

Let all my movements express  
A heart that loves to say 'yes'  
A will that leaps to obey you  
Let all my energy blaze  
To see the joy in your face  
Let my whole being praise you, praise you  
*Teach me to dance to the beat of your heart...*

*Graham Kendrick  
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