

27th Jan 2019: Life in Spirit 3: Receiving the Spirit **Go4th**

This week we've been celebrating the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. It's always a special week for us because as many of you know we are an ecumenical church – ecumenical is a posh word for different churches working together. So here at All Saints we are united as Anglican, Baptist, Methodist and United Reformed into *one* church, living and sharing together. We are also licensed for Catholic services too.

Unity for us is at the heart of our existence, and I want to say today that I am every bit as committed to exercising that unity, both here and with our fellow local believers, as ever I was. In fact this week I made an arrangement with the pastor of the Vineyard church which meets in Monkston School to plan a joint prayer event around the time of Pentecost. More on that in the months to come.

However, although we celebrate our unity locally, our focus this week has been to pray for Christians *around the world*, especially those who have to suffer for their faith. Some of you will know, but some of you may not, that it is illegal to convert to Christianity or to own a bible (or both) in more than 50 countries around the world. We're not talking about religious extremists – a simple public confession of faith, or to be caught by the police with a bible hidden under your mattress can get you arrested, imprisoned or even executed.

And yet, despite the real danger, despite the fear and oppression and often poverty that comes with systematic discrimination, it is estimated that 200 million Christians live in these countries. And faith is spreading rapidly in places where you'd never expect it.

So this week we have used a little booklet to support these sisters and brothers in prayer and I hope many of you have been both inspired and challenged by what you've read and prayed.

But what is it that unites us? What gives us this sense of unity with so many Christians in so many cultures and countries across the world? If I asked you that question, some of you would say things like the creed

- a common set of beliefs – or the Lord’s Prayer, or maybe the 10 Commandments. And those things would all be good answers.

But our unity goes deeper than that. It goes deeper than principles and practices to *the very heart of the God we worship*. We have a **common Saviour** – when Jesus dies and rises again he does so not just for one country or culture, but for all people for all time. ‘Jesus is Lord’ was the earliest creed of the church and still today all around the world Christians of every culture say these familiar words: ‘Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again’.

We also have a **common Father**. The passage we just read comes immediately *after* Jesus gives his disciples what we now call the Lord’s Prayer, and in it he begins a revolution. He says that we can all call God ‘Father’ – in other words we can relate to him not just as a king from afar, but as a parent, someone to love and be close to.

We all have the same dad – that’s a crazy thought when you think about it – but it’s why calling each other brother and sister is not some fad or some silly affectation or jargon. It’s a spiritual reality. Look around you – these are your spiritual relatives, and you’ll be spending eternity with them, so you might as well get used to it!

So a common Saviour, a common Father – and also a **common Spirit**. Many of you might say the Lord’s Prayer every week or even every day, with all of its requests. But immediately after it Jesus gives us another command which many of us ignore, or hardly use at all. He tells us to ask for the Spirit. ‘Ask and you will receive’ can be applied to lots of things – anything that Jesus can put his name to – but for St Luke it has a clear focus: READ v13b. **Today’s theme is ‘Receiving the Spirit’ and here we draw together our 2 strands – our unity and also our need for the Spirit.** Every Christian around the world is to ask God for more of His Spirit – and in his grace he gives it to us and we receive it. It binds us together as family, it also empowers us to live for Him. As we gather to Go4th today, may we ask for that same Spirit in obedience to Jesus’ command – that we might be united and empowered.