

Sunday 31st May: Pentecost – A BRIEF REFLECTION

Why does Pentecost matter? Why do we have a special day every year, indeed a 10-day season leading up to it, where we celebrate the God the Holy Spirit, and the coming of God's Spirit into the world?

The answer is in those two lovely videos we watched before the last hymn (the text of which is printed on page 2), and in the twin message they carry. A message which I'm going to illustrate with this **beach ball**. If you'll indulge me for half a minute, I'm going to inflate it now...

The Spirit fundamentally works in two ways: first, in our hearts. As Pope Francis shared, our hearts tend to shrink, and it is the Spirit which expands them – inflates them – again, with God's love, and grace and power to live. We need the Holy Spirit to expand our hearts and keep filling, *inflating* them, with the breath of God.

Second, this beach ball is in fact a globe – it's a representation of our earth, and you can see all the countries on it. As Professor Tom Wright shared in our other video, it was **the Spirit which turned the disciples hope to joy and gave them the energy, the vision, the power to take God's message out to the world**. The Spirit blew, and the message spread from a tiny country on the Eastern side of the Mediterranean to reach the whole world.

The Spirit literally means *breath* or *wind*, and I like the ambiguity of that. It is an image which is both gentle and powerful, and we often prefer one to the other. But we need both. To those who prefer the gentle breath, I would encourage you to seek the powerful wind, to lose a bit of control sometimes as God sweeps you along. To those thrill-seekers who prefer the rushing wind, never forget the supreme value of the gentle breath which leads you and whispers to you every day – our faith needs to sustain us for the slopes of the valley much more often than the grandeur of the mountaintop.

The breath and the wind. The internal work of the Spirit in the heart; the external work in the world. I'm going to draw these threads together in two ways. First I'm going to play you something which celebrates what it means for the Spirit to go out into the world. I love the fact that we have a very diverse family here in our churches, and this week I asked a few people to record the last verse of our bible reading in their heart language, or one which they use often. It echoes what happened at Pentecost as the disciples spoke in other languages and reminds us that God's wind is still blowing and reaching across the world – *PLAY RECORDINGS of 'Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.'*

Thank you to all of you who recorded those for us. Finally, let's focus on the Spirit in our own lives. Let's pray for the Spirit to inflate our hearts, that we too might find our hope turned to joy, and experience God's love and power renewed in our lives. Let's sing this hymn – Breathe on me, breath of God – as *our* prayer before God today. Amen, come Holy Spirit...

Note: transcript of the two videos follows overleaf...

Pope Francis – recorded in conversation with Archbishop Justin Welby in 2019

‘Come, Holy Spirit.’ This is the claim of all the Christians, at Pentecost as it is today.

‘Come, Holy Spirit.’ That is the promise of the Father and the promise of Jesus – so that the Holy Spirit may enlarge and widen our hearts. We all have a problem, and that is that our hearts tend to shrink, become smaller and close up. We can’t solve that problem by ourselves: only the Holy Spirit can solve it.

Come, Holy Spirit. And to Jesus, thy kingdom come. The kingdom of the Father that you came to announce. And to you my brothers and sisters, with my brother Justin Welby, we want to tell you that we walk alongside you in this prayer: Thy Kingdom Come.

And so we open our hearts and ask the prayer that makes us breathe: the breath of God, the Holy Spirit – come, Holy Spirit.

For you in this time of Pentecost, I’m with you, and I ask you to be with me, to pray the same prayer: Come, Holy Spirit.

Archbishop Justin Welby and Professor Tom Wright – recorded in 2019 for ‘Thy Kingdom Come’

Ab Justin: 2000 years ago, more or less, there was a huge disturbance in an open space where something very dramatic had just happened in a neighbouring house. We’re in Trafalgar Square – it doesn’t quite matter where you are – but we call it Pentecost. What did Pentecost mean for them? What’s it mean for you and for us now?

Prof. Tom: Pentecost had meant for them the giving of the law, God’s law coming to enable the people to be God’s people. And they were waiting, many Jews were waiting, for God to do something new. They were living on hope, and what we find with the early church is that they still have a hope, but the hope is really suffused now with joy, because something has happened, as a result of which the whole world is a different place and they’re part of it.

And that’s a wonderful thing, it calls for great celebration – in Jerusalem just like it would be had it happened in Trafalgar Square. The key thing is that something is here launched in which we are caught up. It isn’t that we’re spectators, we’re all invited now to be participants in the new thing that God is doing.

Ab Justin: And if you’d met the disciples a week before the crucifixion and you’d met them a week after Pentecost, what’s the difference?

Prof. Tom: Well, the difference is that they are astonished. They’re still trying to figure out what it’s all about, but they know that God’s new world has begun, and that they are somehow commissioned to be part of that, and to take that message out into the world.

Ab Justin: And, I suppose, what would their character have been?

Prof Tom: Well, clearly as we see in the Book of Acts, their character has both changed and remained the same. I mean, Peter is still a blustering, blundering chap, but he’s now got this new energy, which enables him to see the new things that God is doing, and I think that having your eyes open to see that God can and does do new things, and that you can be part of that, is part of what it’s all about.

Ab Justin: It’s wonderful. One’s always struck by the joy of the disciples.

Prof Tom: Absolutely. It’s the replacement of hope with joy. Not that you lose hope, but that you’re not just waiting. Something has happened, and that’s the cause of joy.