

Bethlehem Lutheran Church Wagga Wagga

Pentecost Sunday

23rd May, 2021

The Triune God meets with us

Come, Holy Spirit. Fill the hearts of your faithful people
and kindle in them the fire of your love.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

Amen

Clip

We sing the song 'Spirit' (ATA 218)

*Spirit, Spirit of gentleness,
blow through the wilderness, calling and free.
Spirit, Spirit of restlessness,
stir me from placidness, wind, wind on the sea.*

1. You moved on the waters, you called to the deep,
then you coaxed up the mountains from the valleys of sleep;
and over the aeons you called to each thing:
Wake from your slumbers and rise on your wings.

*Spirit, Spirit of gentleness,
blow through the wilderness, calling and free.
Spirit, Spirit of restlessness,
stir me from placidness, wind, wind on the sea.*

2. You swept through the desert, you stung with the sand,
and you goaded your people with a law and a land;
and when they were blinded by their idols and lies,
then you spoke through your prophets to open their eyes.

*Spirit, Spirit of gentleness,
blow through the wilderness, calling and free.
Spirit, Spirit of restlessness,*

stir me from placidness, wind, wind on the sea.

3. You sang in a stable, you cried from a hill,
then you whispered in silence when the whole world was still;
and down in the city you called once again,
when you blew through your people on the rush of the wind.

*Spirit, Spirit of gentleness,
blow through the wilderness, calling and free.
Spirit, Spirit of restlessness,
stir me from placidness, wind, wind on the sea.*

4. You call from tomorrow, you break ancient schemes.
From the bondage of sorrow the captives dream dreams;
our women see visions, our men clear their eyes;
with bold new decisions your people arise.

*Spirit, Spirit of gentleness,
blow through the wilderness, calling and free.
Spirit, Spirit of restlessness,
stir me from placidness, wind, wind on the sea.*

Words and music: Jim Manley Ezekiel 37

Acts 2

Genesis 1

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We confess our sins to God the Father...

Friends in Christ: Jesus said to his apostles: 'Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone's sins, they are forgiven; if you proclaim them unforgiven, unforgiven they remain.'

Let us confess our sins to God our Father and ask him in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to forgive us.

We confess to you, almighty God, before the whole company of heaven, and to each other, that we have sinned in thought, word, and deed, by our own fault. Have mercy on us, for Jesus' sake, forgive us all our sins, and bring us to eternal life. Amen.

-Silent confession-

...and God forgives us

May the almighty and merciful Lord grant us pardon and forgiveness of all our sins.

Amen.

Restore us again, O God our Saviour.

Do not be angry with us any longer.

Lord, Have Mercy

Risen Lord Jesus, hear our prayer and give us your Spirit of life.

Lord, have mercy.

Risen Lord Jesus, hear our prayer and give us your Spirit of joy.

Christ, have mercy.

Risen Lord Jesus, hear our prayer and give us your Spirit of peace.

Lord, have mercy.

Jesus leads us as we pray

The Lord be with you

And also with you.

Let us pray for the power of the Holy Spirit. *[silence]*

Almighty and merciful God, you sent your Holy Spirit at Pentecost, making the disciples bold to preach the good news.

Send us out with the power of the same Spirit to spread the fire of your love. We ask this through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Amen.

1st Reading – God speaks

Acts 2:1-21 *The coming of the Holy Spirit*

¹ When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. ²

Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. ³ They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. ⁴ All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.

⁵ Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under

heaven. ⁶ When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard their own language being spoken. ⁷ Utterly amazed, they asked: "Aren't all these who are speaking Galileans? ⁸ Then how is it that each of us hears them in our native language? ⁹ Parthians, Medes and Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, ¹⁰ Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene; visitors from Rome ¹¹ (both Jews and converts to Judaism); Cretans and Arabs—we hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!" ¹² Amazed and perplexed, they asked one another, "What does this mean?"

¹³ Some, however, made fun of them and said, "They have had too much wine."

Peter Addresses the Crowd

¹⁴ Then Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice and addressed the crowd: "Fellow Jews and all of you who live in Jerusalem, let me explain this to you; listen carefully to what I say. ¹⁵ These people are not drunk, as you suppose. It's only nine in the morning! ¹⁶ No, this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel:

¹⁷ "'In the last days, God says,

I will pour out my Spirit on all people.

Your sons and daughters will prophesy,

your young men will see visions,

your old men will dream dreams.

¹⁸ Even on my servants, both men and women,

I will pour out my Spirit in those days,

and they will prophesy.

¹⁹ I will show wonders in the heavens above

and signs on the earth below,

blood and fire and billows of smoke.

²⁰ The sun will be turned to darkness

and the moon to blood

before the coming of the great and glorious day of the Lord.

²¹ And everyone who calls

on the name of the Lord will be saved.'

This is the word of the Lord

Thanks be to God

We respond with Psalm 104:24-34,35b

²⁴ How many are your works, Lord!

In wisdom you made them all;
the earth is full of your creatures.

²⁵ There is the sea, vast and spacious,
teeming with creatures beyond number—
living things both large and small.

²⁶ There the ships go to and fro,
and Leviathan, which you formed to frolic there.

²⁷ All creatures look to you
to give them their food at the proper time.

²⁸ When you give it to them,
they gather it up;
when you open your hand,
they are satisfied with good things.

²⁹ When you hide your face,
they are terrified;
when you take away their breath,
they die and return to the dust.

³⁰ When you send your Spirit,
they are created,
and you renew the face of the ground.

³¹ May the glory of the Lord endure forever;
may the Lord rejoice in his works—

³² he who looks at the earth, and it trembles,
who touches the mountains, and they smoke.

³³ I will sing to the Lord all my life;
I will sing praise to my God as long as I live.

³⁴ May my meditation be pleasing to him,
as I rejoice in the Lord.

³⁵ But may sinners vanish from the earth
and the wicked be no more.

Praise the Lord, my soul.

Praise the Lord.

2nd Reading – God speaks through his apostles

Romans 8:22-27 *As we live in hope, the Spirit intercedes for us*

²² We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. ²³ Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption to sonship, the redemption of our bodies. ²⁴ For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what they already have? ²⁵ But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently.

²⁶ In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans. ²⁷ And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for God's people in accordance with the will of God.

This is the word of the Lord

Thanks be to God

Alleluia.

The Spirit of the Lord fills the world. Alleluia!

Alleluia.

Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful people,
and kindle in them the fire of your love.

Alleluia.

Gospel reading – God speaks through Jesus

John 15:26,27; 16:4b-15 *The work of the Spirit of truth*

²⁶ "When the Advocate comes, whom I will send to you from the Father—the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father—he will testify about me.

²⁷ And you also must testify, for you have been with me from the beginning.

⁴ I did not tell you this from the beginning because I was with you, ⁵ but now I am going to him who sent me. None of you asks me, 'Where are you going?' ⁶ Rather, you are filled with grief because I have said these things. ⁷ But very truly I tell you, it is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Advocate will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you. ⁸ When he comes, he will prove the world to be in the wrong about sin and righteousness and judgment: ⁹ about sin, because people do not believe in me; ¹⁰ about righteousness, because I am going to the Father, where you can see me no longer; ¹¹ and about judgment, because the prince of this world now stands condemned.

¹² "I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear. ¹³ But when he,

the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. ¹⁴ He will glorify me because it is from me that he will receive what he will make known to you. ¹⁵ All that belongs to the Father is mine. That is why I said the Spirit will receive from me what he will make known to you."

This is the gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you, O Christ.

Thank you, Lord Jesus Christ, for sending the Holy Spirit.

Fill us with the joy and peace of the Spirit.

Amen.

God speaks to His children

MAIN POINT

The Holy Spirit comes to help us

SCRIPTURE FOCUS

All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit. Acts 2:4a

AIDS

A balloon. (Have a spare).

ADDRESS

I know some people don't like balloons, but I would like to use one this morning to help me show you something. If you like balloons, why do you like them? What can you do with a balloon?

Show the deflated balloon.

Well, here's a balloon. Let's throw it back and forth OR let's hang it up to decorate the church.

No, what's wrong? It needs to be blown up doesn't it?

People are a lot like this balloon. We cannot do everything God created us to do when we're empty.

That's why God fills us with his Holy Spirit.

Blow up the balloon.

Now we can try and pass it back and forth.

God filled you with his Holy Spirit when you were baptised. It's the Holy Spirit

inside you, who helps you to be the person God wants you to be.

PRAYER

Dear God, you sent the Holy Spirit to the disciples on the first Pentecost. Let the Holy Spirit work in our lives. Give us the strength and courage to serve you, your church on earth and all people. Amen.

We sing the hymn 'O Spirit of life, O Spirit of God' (LHS 128)

- 1. O Spirit of life, O Spirit of God,
you comfort us in every need,
sent down to us from heaven's high throne,
from God the Father and the Son,
O Spirit of life, O Spirit of God.**
- 2. O Spirit of life, O Spirit of God,
make us to love your holy word.
Your flame of love to us impart,
that love for all may fill each heart,
O Spirit of life, O Spirit of God.**
- 3. O Spirit of life, O Spirit of God,
increase our faith in our dear Lord.
Unless your grace the power should give
none can believe in Christ and live,
O Spirit of life, O Spirit of God.**
- 4. O Spirit of life, O Spirit of God,
enlighten us by your blest word.
To us the heavenly Father show,
and teach us his dear Son to know,
O Spirit of life, O Spirit of God.**
- 5. O Spirit of life, O Spirit of God,
by you our souls to heaven are led.
Make us to strive with valour here,
and reign with you in glory there,
O Spirit of life, O Spirit of God.**

*O heiliger Geist, o heiliger Gott
attrib Johannes Niedling 1602-68*

God speaks to us

The LCA provides this sermon edited for lay-reading, with thanks to the original author.

The Text: John 15:26a

How do you measure the success of the church?

What are the indicators that tell us the church is accomplishing anything and has a purpose for its existence?

What benchmarks can we use to assess whether the church is doing anything useful or not?

When talking to people from certain churches the conversation inevitably turns into numbers—how many hundreds attended a particular worship service, how many gave their lives to the Lord, how many children attend the ‘Children’s Church’, and so on. Is this suggesting that the success of a church is measured by how many bums on seats there are on any given Sunday? Is that a true benchmark of testing a church’s success?

Another question that is asked, “What style of music do you have at your church?” Do we measure the success of a congregation by its music styles and the musicians it has available to lead worship and how dynamic the worship leaders are?

It’s natural for people to judge a church by the number of people that go through the doors on Sundays. It’s impressive to sit in a church crowded with people and to feel the energy singing with a large gathering. But is the church that barely has 20 people, with no musicians and a recording if they’re lucky, singing the old style hymns as best they can with at least one loud off key singer and often having one of their own read a sermon from the internet—is this church deemed to be a failure by what you see happening on Sunday?

We get so hung up on the idea that for something to be good it has to be bigger and better than anything else. This is worldly thinking that so easily leads to pride, boasting, superiority and self-importance. Jesus turns this kind of thinking upside down when he says the first shall be last, and “If one of you wants to be great, you must be the servant of the rest” (Matthew 20:26).

Where 2 or 3 are gathered on a Sunday this is no less the church. What happens

on Sundays is only a fraction of what the church is all about and what it is doing, and those words of Jesus about greatness consisting of being a servant is central to this.

Recently a delivery man knocked on a pastor's door with a parcel. Before leaving he asked: "Do people really still go to church on Sundays?" Affirming that they did, the pastor went on to describe that church was more than what happened on Sunday. He talked about the ministry to school children, to the elderly, to those facing difficult times, and the many volunteers at work within the community.

The church and the work of the Holy Spirit aren't always about the spectacular and the amazing. Too often our chatter about the Spirit latches on to the unusual; the exceptional, the wildly flamboyant. People tend to limit the visitation of the Spirit to special, miraculous spiritual experiences.

Maybe you have been to a very moving and uplifting worship service. The music and drama touched the soul, the preaching was clear and well presented, the choirs were truly angelic, the pipe organ really magnificent, the bands incredible. People said that the Holy Spirit was truly present in the worship that day and no doubt he was. But by limiting the Holy Spirit to the amazing and spectacular, we can miss the prime importance of the normal, loving activity of the Spirit in our lives, and through our lives to others.

A good place to find out about the Holy Spirit is from Jesus himself in chapters 14-16 of John's Gospel. When Jesus talked about the Holy Spirit there is no mention of the spectacular. The majority of the Spirit's work is done quietly. Jesus uses the word 'Paraclete', a Greek word that has a vast meaning including 'Counsellor', 'Comforter', 'Helper', 'Encourager', 'Advocate' and 'One called by the side of another'. There is nothing rapturous, effervescent, thrilling, highly emotive, or spectacular about the title 'Paraclete'. The Spirit is that holy Friend who quietly works in us and through us every day behind the scenes in the basic activities of our lives and the lives of the people around us.

Some people feel guilty that they haven't experienced the spectacular and unusual working of the Holy Spirit or they feel bad because other thoughtless Christians have insinuated that there is something wrong with their faith because they haven't experienced the miraculous power of the Holy Spirit. Yet in reality, the Holy Spirit has been very much alive in their lives as they have steadily borne the beautiful fruits of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness,

faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. They had been touching the lives around them with the greatest fruit of all—love.

It's easy to take for granted the work of the Holy Spirit. It's a bit like living here in Australia. We take the weather, the natural beauty of the coast, the ranges, the bush, the rainforest, the rugged outback, and the wildlife pretty much for granted. We drive up and down the coast or up into the ranges without even thinking about it. It's all pretty much every day routine and we don't even see it as anything amazing.

When overseas visitors come to our country and express their exclamations at a view, or amazement at the open spaces we have, or their gasps at the natural beauty of our flora and fauna, suddenly we see these things with fresh eyes and marvel again at the great things around us that we overlook so often every day.

That's what happens with the Holy Spirit. Because he is the quiet helper in the background, the unassuming friend, the unobtrusive guide and comforter, we take his presence for granted.

The Holy Spirit, the Helper is quietly at work:

- in the sincere concern of a friend for our health,
- in the generosity of those who give us so much help,
- in the inner strength we discover in times of crisis,
- in those moments when we admit that we have been wrong,
- in making a tough choice,
- in the resilience of people who face one bad thing after another,
- in times when we have dared to love even though it was hard to do so.

The Holy Spirit, the Helper is quietly at work:

- in taking on responsibilities that we once thought beyond us,
- in refusing to let the greed of society take over our soul,
- in giving thanks always even though times have been hard,
- in rising above past failures and putting past hurts behind us,
- in finding a central core of peace in the midst of turmoil,
- in an adult patiently teaching a child self-esteem and self-control,
- in the person sitting quietly beside a hospital bed,

- in a parent praying for a troubled son or daughter.

This is just the beginning of the Spirit's story. The Holy Spirit, the Paraclete, is active amongst us in a quiet, pervasive, reflective manner, inspiring the fruits of the Spirit amongst us. This is where the real work of the church is happening.

There is a time and a place for the amazing and spectacular, for the choirs and loud music, but the real powerful work of the Spirit in a congregation is when the people become Christ to others and serve them in whatever way they are able with whatever gifts God has given to do that work.

A church can have the most spectacular worship or a simple basic style, fantastic facilities or a borrowed hall, wonderful music or no music, crowds of people or just a small group—whatever the situation there is one test that applies to all as far as the Holy Spirit goes—and that is love. It has to be the same kind of love that Jesus has for us—sacrificial, self-giving, committed, generous, peace-seeking, patient, caring and gentle. It's the kind of love that knows how hard it is for each of us to be like this and so, like Jesus, it is ready to forgive each other's faults.

The spectacular cannot replace or is not more important than the quiet, pervasive, unassuming work of the Holy Spirit shown in simple acts of love amongst and by those whom Jesus has called together to be his people in the church.

Sin is so deeply rooted in our lives that the Holy Spirit knows that we can't turn our lives around ourselves; that repentance is not something we can do by ourselves; that true faith is an impossibility.

So the Holy Spirit comes to us through the simple word of the Bible, through the simple water of baptism and the simple bread and wine of Communion, bringing to us forgiveness, renewal and change. The Spirit calls us to repentance, to turn our lives around; he calls us to faith and to daily take up our cross and follow Jesus.

The good news is that the Holy Spirit keeps on turning us back to Jesus, keeps on forgiving and renewing us through the word and sacraments. When we encounter the Holy Spirit, we never walk away the same as we were before. He is always creating all things new. Amen.

We confess our faith in the Triune God

**I believe in God, the Father almighty,
maker of heaven and earth.**

**And in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the Virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, dead, and buried.
He descended into hell.
The third day he rose again from the dead.
He ascended into heaven,
and sits at the right hand of God, the Father almighty,
from thence he will come to judge the living and the dead.
I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic* church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting.
Amen.**

** 'catholic' here meaning 'universal'*

We sing the song 'Holy Spirit, Living water' (ATOK 359)

- 1. Holy Spirit, living water,
Flow in us and set us free.
Cleanse our unbelief and sorrow,
Wash our eyes and make us see.**
- 2. Holy Spirit, come as wind and
Blow the dust of death away.
Breathe the gift of life into us,
Lighten hearts to laugh and play.**
- 3. Holy Spirit, rushing fire,
Burn with truth and justice here.
Catch our minds alight with passion,
Perfect love that casts out fear.**
- 4. Holy Spirit, come in silence,
Wordlessly to heal and bless.
Be the heart that prays within us,**

Fill the void with tenderness.

- 5. Holy Spirit, blessed Wisdom,
Teach us all of God's delight.
Offer us the wine of grace and
Make us children of the Light.**

*Words: Elizabeth Smith. Music: Chris Chataway
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We give of ourselves

**Holy God, may the Spirit you give us make us more and more like your Son,
loving and self-giving.**

Amen.

We pray for others

*Let us pray for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the church and for all people
according to their needs.*

Thank you, Holy Father, for giving the Holy Spirit to your people at Pentecost, as you had promised. Pour out your life-giving Spirit on your church throughout the world and equip its members with the gifts of your Spirit. Especially equip all pastors with the truth of your word, the gospel of peace, and the love of Christ.

Lord, in your mercy...**hear our prayer.**

You sent out your Spirit on the disciples like the rush of a mighty wind and distributed tongues of fire on their heads. Burn out all that is evil in us; consecrate all your people for holy service and empower us to work with you for the salvation of the world.

Lord, in your mercy...**hear our prayer.**

You inspired the disciples with your Spirit to praise your marvelous deeds in many different languages. Unloose the tongues of all your people, so that we may joyfully confess you as our Lord and boldly proclaim our common faith to the world. Bless the witness to Christ given by all the churches in this area; give all Christians the unity that is only possible through the Holy Spirit and your word of truth.

Lord, in your mercy...**hear our prayer.**

Your Spirit touched the hearts of those who heard the gospel from Peter. Sharpen the consciences of those who hear your word and convince them of its

truth, so that they may turn from their sins and receive the gift of forgiveness. Open the minds and hearts of those in our homes, in our neighbourhoods and in our workplaces to hear and believe.

Lord, in your mercy...**hear our prayer.**

You gave the Holy Spirit to all those who were baptised on the day of Pentecost. Let your Spirit renew the faith of all those who have been baptised, so that they may devote themselves in public worship to the teaching of the apostles, the giving of gifts to you, the breaking of bread in the Lord's supper, and the prayer of the church for the world.

Lord, in your mercy...**hear our prayer.**

You brought light out of darkness and order out of chaos by your Spirit in the creation of the world. Let your Spirit move over our unruly world and heal its broken people. Bring peace to places where there is trouble and unrest.

Lord, in your mercy...**hear our prayer.**

Your Spirit brought healing and hope through the good news of Jesus' resurrection. Give this same healing and hope to all who are sick or distressed today, including those known to us personally to be in need and whom we now name in our hearts... (brief silence)

Lord, in your mercy...**hear our prayer.**

You united people from many different nations and cultures by your Holy Spirit. Bring together those who have been divided by misunderstanding, hatred, and mistrust, and join us with them and all the angels as we adore you forever; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reign with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Amen.

We pray the prayer of Jesus

**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.** *Matt 6:9-13*

**For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours now and forever.
Amen.**

The Triune God sends us out with blessing

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope; . . .

Go in peace, filled with the Holy Spirit.

Thanks be to God.

We sing the hymn 'O Holy Spirit, enter in' (LHS 124)

1. **O Holy Spirit, enter in,
and in our hearts your work begin,
and make our hearts your dwelling.
Sun of the soul, O Light divine,
around and in us brightly shine,
your strength in us upwelling.
In your radiance
life from heaven
now is given
overflowing,
gift of gifts beyond all knowing.**
2. **Left to ourselves, we surely stray;
O lead us on the narrow way,
with wisest counsel guide us;
and give us steadfastness, that we
may follow you for ever free,
no matter who derides us.
Gently heal those
hearts now broken;
give some token
you are near us,
whom we trust to light and cheer us.**
3. **O mighty rock, O source of life,**

**let your good word in doubt and strife
be in us strongly burning,
that we be faithful unto death
and live in love and holy faith,
from you true wisdom learning.
Lord, your mercy
on us shower;
by your power
Christ confessing,
we will cherish all your blessing.**

*O Heiliger Geist, kehre bei uns ein
Michael Schirmer 1606-73
tr Catherine Winkworth 1827-78 (1863) adapted
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Announcements