

Salford Methodist Circuit



Oh How We Sang When The Holy Spirit Came - Pentecost

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Good morning everyone, and welcome to worship.

Today is the day of Pentecost - the day when we remember the day when the church was born. There was no church at all before that day - that first day of Pentecost. Yes - there were those who had been following Jesus - some of them in a very committed way throughout his years of ministry. But that all ended in the violence of his death. There was no more wandering around hearing great stories, learning important life lessons, and watching in awe and wonder as the sick were healed, the lame walked, the blind saw and the deaf heard. That had all come to an end. And the crowd of enthusiastic followers and the band of committed friends were scattered to the four winds.

We've heard in the last few weeks about how Jesus returned - resurrected and alive. And how he gradually drew his followers, especially the committed ones, out of their hiding places, and instructed them on the next step. But his main instruction was - wait! Wait for the right moment - you will know! Wait! Don't rush. Take it slowly.

That all sounds very familiar. We've been waiting for the right moment, for months and months now. Our lives have largely been on hold, and in hiding, protecting ourselves and each other. But as our nation becomes a safer place, the time is almost upon us to resume our normal ways of life.

Today - the Day of Pentecost, I want to us to explore what happened so long ago, in Jerusalem, and think about what all of it might mean for us, here and now.

Hymn: Wait For The Lord

*Wait for the Lord, His day is near,
Wait for the Lord, be strong, take heart.
(Repeat)*

Prayer

Lord, we've been so tired of waiting. It's been hard. It's challenged every part of us.

We want to be doing. We want to be together. We want to be talking and laughing and sharing. We want to be out there, enjoying your world in all its fullness. But you have said, wait, as you said wait to your disciples long ago.

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The time of waiting for the disciples came to an end on the day of Pentecost, as you used them in astonishing and dramatic ways, empowered by your Spirit, to begin something new and vibrant and vital.

And our time of waiting is coming to an end. You have a work for us to do, in this changed and cautious world in which we find ourselves. And you are with us though your Spirit, as powerful as it ever was.

Draw worship from our hearts this day, as we listen to your word, as we explore it's meaning, and as we prepare ourselves for where your Spirit is leading us next.

We offer ourselves to you this day. Amen

So the time of waiting for the disciples was over, and God acted with them and through them in power, to turn this world upside down from the inside out. Let's hear about what happened as recorded in the book of Acts chapter 2. Do join in with the chorus that accompanies the reading.

*Oh, how we laughed, oh, how we sang,
Oh, how we danced for joy in his name,
Oh, how we laughed, oh, how we sang,
Oh, how we danced when the Holy Spirit came!*

When the day of Pentecost came they were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from Heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting.

Oh, how we laughed...

They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.

Oh, how we laughed...

Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under Heaven. When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard them speaking in his own language.

Oh, how we laughed...

Amazed and perplexed, they asked each other, "What does this mean?" Some, however, made fun of them and cried, "They have had too much wine!"

Oh, how we laughed...



Then Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice and addressed the crowd: "Fellow Jews and all of you who are in Jerusalem, let me explain this to you; listen carefully to what I say."

Oh, how we laughed...

This is what is spoken by the prophet, Joel: "In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people."

Oh, how we laughed...

Can you remember what it felt like to be in a crowd? It seems like so long since we found ourselves in crowded places. In fact, we've done our best to minimise our contact with large groups of people. We've kept our distance. We've probably expressed our horror at television coverage of crowds in city centres and shopping centres, and on busy beaches seemingly ignoring the rules. If you're like me, you'll have dodged the places where lots of others may have chosen to go. Busy places have been out of bounds. In fact, they have scarcely existed at all in the past year. Full football stadiums, music festivals, crowded street events all a thing of memory.

In Jerusalem on the first day of Pentecost the crowds were huge. People would have flocked there for the festival - the harvest festival - specifically the festival to celebrate the first fruits of the wheat harvest. It wasn't a serious sombre time like Passover just a few weeks before. It was a fun festival, a time of happiness and celebration. Wealthy merchants would be jostling along with county peasants, and pilgrims from every corner of the middle east and beyond. The people were in high spirits.

And into the midst of crowded chaos, God broke in in power. Over the babble of conversations, the cries of the salespeople, the laughter and the good-humoured street banter, was heard the sound of people praising God, and telling the good news of hope and peace and purpose in Jesus Christ. There was a huge spontaneous outpouring of joy from the heart of these Galileans: fisherman and tax collectors, old and young; all of them suddenly confident in all that they believed, and bursting to share it with all around them, whatever their faith, nationality, or language. And somehow, everyone understood what was being shared.

There was Peter, the one who weeks before had denied that he knew Jesus at all, the one who had blundered along at Jesus's side, trying and often failing to understand, and putting his foot in it in all his enthusiasm. There was Peter, who had been in hiding, riddled with guilt, terrified of repercussions for these last few weeks. There was Peter, standing in the heart of the crowd, speaking in a voice of great authority and confidence, as he shared the message of the

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Saviour, the Messiah, Jesus Christ who once was dead but is alive again: a message of hope for life now as well as for all eternity. And the people, whoever they were, stopped to listen, and were engrossed in the message. So impressed and so moved were they that on that day 3000 stood alongside the disciples and declared their faith and hope in the living Christ.

Let's hear a bit of Peter's sermon, preached that day in Jerusalem, and recorded in the book of Acts to be heard by us still.

Reading: Acts 2: 22 - 39

Fellow Israelites, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know. This man was handed over to you by God's deliberate plan and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross. But God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him. David said about him:

*"I saw the Lord always before me.
Because he is at my right hand, I will not be shaken.
Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices; my body also
will rest in hope,
because you will not abandon me to the realm of the dead,
you will not let your holy one see decay.
You have made known to me the paths of life;
you will fill me with joy in your presence.'*

"Fellow Israelites, I can tell you confidently that the patriarch David died and was buried, and his tomb is here to this day. But he was a prophet and knew that God had promised him on oath that he would place one of his descendants on his throne. Seeing what was to come, he spoke of the resurrection of the Messiah, that he was not abandoned to the realm of the dead, nor did his body see decay. God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of it. Exalted to the right hand of God, he has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and has poured out what you now see and hear. For David did not ascend to heaven, and yet he said,

*"The Lord said to my Lord: 'Sit at my right hand
until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.'"*

"Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Messiah."

When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?" Peter replied,

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"Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off - for all whom the Lord our God will call."

Hymn: A Living Pentecost

*Streets are filled with many people, voices raised in every tongue,
Bringing first-fruits of their harvest, gift to God from old and young.
In the midst of celebration, comes a new unsettling sound:
A cacophony of praising, Word alive, Spirit-unbound!*

*God is here, speaking our language, speaking as we do,
Christ alive, here in Spirit, and turns the tables, upsets conventions,
Brings a new church to birth, today a living Pentecost.*

*Mighty wind blows through the city, sweeps a new age into birth,
Holy fire to burn the boundaries and ignite God's reign on earth.
Aramaic, Persian, Coptic, Parthian, Arabic and Greek,
Heard and understood and spoken, God in multilingual speak!
God is here...*

*Wake up call to every nation, chaos melts, new paths made plain,
Harvest now for new creation, these the first-fruits of Christ's reign.
We, God's church arise for action, move in faith to break new ground,
Spirit, take us to the margins where your living work is found.
God is here...*

Can you remember a moment when you were so excited that the excitement bubbled over with loud enthusiasm? Can you remember a time when you were bursting to tell others about something that had happened? Perhaps it was a moment of falling in love? Perhaps it was the receiving of good exam results, or a new job? If it happened in the last few years, was it something that you posted on Facebook or tweeted to world? Or perhaps you were so off your head with excitement that you just talked and talked and talked about it.

Remember the famous episode in the life of Archimedes, the ancient Greek scientist and mathematician who precedes Jesus by a couple of hundred years. Archimedes realised, while taking a bath, that the density of an object, in this case his own body, could be determined by calculating how much water had been displaced by it - in other words how far further up the bath the water had risen when he was sitting in it - something it's always important to be aware of before you fill the bath too full, and then leap in! Archimedes was so excited by this discovery, that he leapt out of his bath and, forgetting to dress, he ran down

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the street stark naked shouting "Eureka! I've found it", and getting himself remembered for at least the next 2000 years!

Think of the sheer jubilant enthusiasm of a team that has just won the cup, or a sports person who has broken a record or won a gold medal. Think of the welling up of emotions, and of the sheer energy that comes with excitement, even though they may have just run around a football pitch for at least 90 minutes; even though they have just run a marathon, or broke the sound barrier with the speed of their sprinting.

Think of a politician who has just won an election, buoyed with enthusiasm at their own and their party's success, buzzing with the infectious enthusiasm of their supporters, and bursting forth with fluent and confident oration.

I remember someone telling me they felt I was on fire on one occasion. And I remember that feeling of excitement very well. I was at a day course, looking at mission and what it might look like in a 21st century UK context. I remember asking God what was being required of me in that moment, and in the situation of my ministry at the time. And during the course I saw the way forward in absolute clarity. The things that the leaders of the course were saying, the conversations I was having with others, a whole series of stuff built for me a picture of the way forward for my churches and my ministry. And I was absolutely buzzing with enthusiasm as I talked to people that I knew on that day.

The thing about that particular experience of being on fire for me - it wasn't a one day one moment experience, though I remember my feelings on that day very well. I didn't stop being on fire - it didn't vanish as I moved on to other things. On the contrary, I was on fire with passion and enthusiasm for the purpose I had found in God which lasted until the day I walked away from that work into a different set of challenges. I wasn't on a high every day for the next six years. That would have been exhausting for me and everyone else around. But I was completely committed to it, completely focused, and completely sure that it was of God. Lots of things happened in those following six years which reaffirmed that I was doing and being what God was calling me to do and to be.

It was like that for the disciples on the day of Pentecost and beyond. Not just the 12, but the 3000 new disciples on that first day, and all those who became believers in the coming weeks, months and years. Every one of them was clear that God was calling them to share the good news of all that the living Christ meant for this world. And they did exactly that. They took the message everywhere. Everywhere they went. And everywhere they went new churches sprang up as people joined together with other believers, to worship God, to share their resources, and to support one another as they continued the spread of the good news. It began in Jerusalem, but in just a few short years it had spread beyond what we call the Holy Land to all its neighbours, all around the Mediterranean coastline including north Africa, what we now call Turkey and

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Greece, up through the Balkans, throughout Italy, and right across to France and Spain. It had gone down the Nile through Egypt, Sudan and into what we now call Ethiopia, and it had crossed the Arabian peninsula. It may even have reached Britain in that first century. The spread continued, and it continues to this day. There are Christians in every part of this world, and the faith is strong still. The church is growing in many parts of this world.

God's Holy Spirit, the Spirit that was present at the moment of creation, as recorded in Genesis, chapter 1, verse 1 was the same Spirit that turned cowering frightened disciples into the people who would propel the mission and purpose of Christ right around this world. There was enough energy in that moment to set ripples flowing that are flowing still. It has never stopped. Nothing has stopped it in any generation for over 2000 years. Neither wars nor persecution nor diseases - nothing in all of creation has stopped the message of God's love reverberating around this world.

Every form of energy declines and stops eventually. A car will run out of petrol if it is not filled up. A runner will reach the end of their strength unless they refuel and rest. A go-cart rolling down a hill will slow and stop eventually as the slope evens out. A laptop or tablet or mobile phone will run out of power unless it is plugged in frequently.

But the message of Pentecost, the good news that Peter spoke about, has never run out of energy. It has flowed from nation to nation, from city to town to village, from church to church, from person to person, without any let up since that first day of Pentecost.

OK I can here you say, even Christians need a boost to their energy from time to time. Well of course they do, we all do! Which is why we join together in worship - to remind ourselves just what the message is that we are following, to encourage one another in the journey that we're all on. That is why we talk about our faith and read the Bible. It is why we pray, not to tell God a whole lot of stuff that the Almighty, all-knowing, all-seeing, all understanding God that we worship already knows, but to engage with the living Spirit in order to receive and be directed in our Christian lives. The energy that has never run out, or slowed down, or slackened off, and which never will, is the energy that is the Holy Spirit, the living power of God which is right here, right now.

So what are we going to do about it, as God's Methodist people here in Salford? Are we going to open our hearts to the endless possibilities of God's living Spirit in our lives and in this world? Do we have the courage to invite that Spirit to empower us in our living and in the sharing the Good News of the living Christ? Are we willing to step out of the security of all we've ever known and head out on a new adventure? We too can be part of the flow of the ripples of God's love here. Or we can just ignore where God might be calling us to go next? The choice is ours.

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You've heard the expression, the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak. Jesus's own words of course. I'd like to end by putting a different context on that expression. The Spirit, God's living Holy Spirit is willing, and more than willing; the Spirit is longing to empower us, the church, forwards. OK the flesh, the human people, us, we who are the church, we are weak. We're no stronger than the disciples who fled the crucifixion and hid in fear in the weeks that followed. The flesh is weak, but when you put weak, willing, fearful people into harness with the power of the Spirit, anything and everything is possible. Are you willing to join your weak flesh with the power of God's Spirit? Are we willing to join together as the weak flesh of God's church as we harness ourselves to the tremendous unfaltering power of the Holy Spirit as we move forwards?

Those are questions we all need to face, both as individuals and as churches. Today we celebrate the birth of the church. We only do that because that birth is the birth of our church too. God is here, and alive and with us, and that facts fills today and our future with real and living hope. May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Prayers (using Holy Spirit How I Love You)

*Holy Spirit, how I love you; Holy Spirit, flood my soul.
Holy Spirit, take me over; Holy Spirit, lead me on.
You're the Strength that helps me in my weakness,
You're the Friend who comes to walk beside;
You're the peace that passes understanding, as You reign in my life.
Holy Spirit, how I love you; Holy Spirit, flood my soul.
Holy Spirit, take me over; Holy Spirit, lead me on.*

Loving God, Lord Jesus, Holy Spirit, the flesh is weak. We are cautious, anxious, uncertain people. We are afraid we are not good enough, or knowledgeable enough, or confident enough, or wise enough to serve your purposes. We make excuses. We try to hide in the background. We somehow convince ourselves that we don't need to be part of this, that we'd be more of a hindrance than a help to your Spirit. But the truth is, you need us and want us to share in your purposes. You will never leave us to fumble our own through this, but are with us constantly, there to guide and empower us with your Spirit, the strongest power in all of creation. The flesh is weak, but the Spirit is willing, and able to accomplish more than we can possibly imagine, if we just open our hearts to you.

Holy Spirit, how I love you...

And so in this moment we do just that. We open our hearts and invite you to fill us and empower us for your purposes. And we ask you to open our eyes to the needs around us; to the people who need a hand or a word of encouragement; to situations in which we, your church, we your people,

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can make a difference. We ask you to open our minds to new possibilities, and to open doors to new opportunities.

We offer our prayers to join with yours for the suffering people of this world. Especially at this time we remember those places and people who are currently bearing the brunt of the pandemic - especially in India, but also in Brazil and other parts of South America, in the USA, and across many areas of Europe. And as we remember the suffering that this disease has brought to so many lives, we also remember that around this world other diseases rage, and suffering is not just as a result of covid. Loving God who suffered and died for this world, we join our prayers with yours, and ask that you make a difference wherever there is suffering. And helpless though we feel, show us too what we can do to help.

Holy Spirit, how I love you...

We ask that you take our faltering steps, our timid hands and our wavering hearts, and that you transform us, as you transformed people on the day of Pentecost, for all that you want us to be and do in the days ahead. We offer your church back to you for your blessing and encouragement, and for clear direction. We offer ourselves to you, and invite your living Spirit to reign in us, this day and for evermore.

Lord's Prayer

*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 that
sin against us.
Save us from the time of trial; and deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours, now and for ever.
Amen*

Have a happy Pentecost Sunday. But above all, may you be inspired, literally, by God's Spirit as you seek to live to God's purposes and glory.

Hymn Take My Life and let it be consecrated, Lord, to thee;

*Take my life, and let it be consecrated, Lord, to thee;
Take my moments and my days, let them flow in ceaseless praise.*

*Take my hands, and let them move at the impulse of thy love;
Take my feet, and let them be swift and beautiful for thee.*

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*Take my voice, and let me sing always, only, for my King;
Take my lips, and let them be filled with messages from thee.*

*Take my silver and my gold, not a mite would I withhold;
Take my intellect, and use every power as thou shalt choose.*

*Take my will, and make it thine; it shall be no longer mine;
Take my heart - it is thine own; it shall be thy royal throne.*

*Take my love; my Lord, I pour at thy feet its treasure-store;
Take myself, and I will be ever, only, all for thee.*

Praise and glory, wisdom and thanks, honour and power and strength, be to our God, forever and ever.

May the blessing of God, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, be with us this day and in the days ahead as we seek to live as his disciples here and now, and for ever. Amen.

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