

worship notes



from the United Reformed Church

Sunday 19th May 2024
Pentecost
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Call to Worship

Come, fire of love, **warm our hearts.**
Come, winds of change, **awaken our senses.**
Come, Spirit of God, **meet us here.**

Prayer of Approach

Source of life,
imager, artist, and author
of such rich and beautiful diversity,
you have room to hold us all inside your love.
We gather here today to seek you, to praise you,
and to lean into the warmth of your grace.

Spirit of God, you are full of surprises.
Intuitive one, you know the needs beneath our words.
Teach us to pray with sighs, with groans, with silence...
bringing the wholeness of who we are
into the fullness of your redeeming love. Amen.

Prayer of Confession

Welcoming God,
you invite us into your life-giving presence,
and we come as we are.

You know us intimately:
our selfishness...
our stubbornness...
our apathy.
You teach us that the truth can set us free.

In these moments of quiet,

we bring you our own prayers of confession... *(silence is held)*.

God of grace and compassion, forgive us.
Redeem our failures. Restore our hope.
Love us back to life. Amen.

Assurance of Grace

In Jesus Christ, God makes all things new.
The former things have disappeared.
God will wipe away every tear from our eyes.
Sisters and Brothers,
your sins are forgiven; be at peace. Amen.

The Lord's Prayer

Invite everyone to join in with saying the words of the Lord's Prayer, each in their own native tongue or the form/language that feels most natural to them. Enjoy the cacophony of voices. If your congregation lacks diversity, you could use a video resource like this one: [The Lord's Prayer in Different Languages | Pentecost 2020 \(youtube.com\)](#)

Prayer for Illumination

Jesus said to his disciples,
"I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now.
When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth."

(John 16:12-13a)

Come, Holy Spirit, freshening breeze.
Breathe life into the ancient words of Scripture.
Let our minds bloom open, like petals unfurling.
Kindle within us your dreams for the earth. Amen.

Readings

Romans 8:22-27 | Acts 2:1-21

All-Age Idea

Pentecost is a special time in the Church year, sometimes referred to as the Church's Birthday. Why not celebrate by lighting some birthday candles? Invite young or young-at-heart volunteers to help with blowing them out... this could lead nicely into exploring

some of the ways the Holy Spirit shows up in the stories of the Bible, as wind, breath, or tongues of flame. For extra surprise/entertainment use “magic” relighting candles.

Depending on how ambitious you’re feeling, the Birthday Party theme could be extended by serving birthday cake after the service or giving out “party bags” with activities to take home. Emphasise the inclusiveness of the Acts 2 story. Everyone is invited and able to join in.

Don’t forget the prayer prompts on the website:

<https://urc.org.uk/your-faith/children-young-people/children-youth-work/prayer-prompts-for-children/>

Sermon Notes

It may not get the same billing as Christmas or Easter, but Pentecost is an important time in the Church year. It’s a time when we celebrate the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the first disciples, as described in the reading from Acts 2. Many consider this event to be the birth of the Christian church.

What I love about the Pentecost story is the radical inclusion. The gift of the Holy Spirit is poured out lavishly and indiscriminately. Everyone is able to join in. They get to hear the Good News in language they understand and can relate to. A sermon on this text could be an opportunity to consider accessibility and welcome in your setting. Is everyone able to join in? What are the barriers? How can we make our worship work for all?

In both the Acts and Romans readings we hear of the Holy Spirit facilitating communication and making relationship possible, even where differences had seemed insurmountable. The Spirit overcomes division and fragmentation – much needed in a divided and fragmented world (and church!). Reflect on where you have seen the Spirit at work in your setting – moments when conflict gives way to grace.

Sometimes the story of Pentecost, with its vibrancy, colour and promise, feels removed from our own experience of church. In the URC many churches are closing and congregations aging. It can be hard to feel hopeful about the future. If your community needs encouragement, the readings contain seeds of hope:

- The community of believers at the end of Acts 1 have experienced a “double bereavement” – Jesus’ death, then his ascension to heaven. They may have been feeling fearful, abandoned, disappointed, confused. This is the situation into which the Holy Spirit comes, fulfilling Jesus’ assurance that we will not be alone.

- The “groaning” in the Romans 8 passage is easy to relate to! Again, we are assured of the Spirit’s help. I cherish the idea – well supported by other passages of Scripture (see Exodus 2:23-24; Judges 2:18; Psalms 12:5 and 38:9) – that groaning is an effective form of prayer!
- Allow the joyful expansiveness of the Acts 2 story to broaden our perspective. We are part of something much bigger. A world-wide family of Christians. Dysfunctional but beloved. Beautiful in our diversity. Woven together by the wild, uncontrollable, and always surprising Spirit of God.

Affirmation of Faith

We believe in a living God,
a God who has not stopped speaking,
who bends the arc of history towards justice.

We believe in a living God.

We believe in God-with-us,
brother in our suffering and victim of our brokenness,
who breathed peace upon his friends,
and promised we will never be alone.

We believe in God with us.

We believe in the Spirit of God,
who dwells within and dances between us.
Healing divisions. Defying expectations.
Igniting creativity and love.

We believe in the Spirit of God.

Prayers of Intercession

These prayers have a ‘call and response’ refrain, based on Psalm 104:30...

Send forth your Spirit to bless and heal,
restore and refresh the earth.

God of love, your creation groans
under the weight of human carelessness and greed.
We pray for forests and glaciers, oceans and rivers,
the air and the soil and the life they sustain.
We pray for communities who are displaced
or endangered by a changing climate.

[Opportunity here to name places of concern]

Help us to restore balance in our lives
and in the ecosystems that hold us.

Send forth your Spirit to bless and heal,
restore and refresh the earth.

We pray for places that are torn apart by war.
Where conflict is entrenched,
and trauma handed down through generations.
Where children are pulled from the rubble.
Where peace seems a distant, impossible dream.

[Opportunity here to name places of concern]

Send forth your Spirit to bless and heal,
restore and refresh the earth.

Breath of life, we pray for your Church.
Blow through us like a wild wind:
disturbing our certainties, stirring our hearts,
energising our worship.
Burn in us like tongues of flame:
illuminating truth, exposing injustice,
beacon of welcome and hope.

Send forth your Spirit to bless and heal,
restore and refresh the earth.

Peacemaker, intercessor, advocate,
we pray for our relationships.
Help us to communicate well.
Gift us with language that's expansive and inclusive.
Make us generous in our listening,
and courageous in confronting our own prejudice and privilege.
Warm with compassion hearts that are hardened by hurt.

Send forth your Spirit to bless and heal,
restore and refresh the earth. Amen.

Blessing

May the Spirit of God
blow through our lives,
unsettling our certainties,
awakening our imaginations,
driving us out into adventure.

And may the blessing of God:
Source, Saviour and Spirit
be yours today and always. Amen.

Hymn Suggestions				
	RS	CH4	StF	MP
Come down, O Love Divine	294	489	372	89
Breathe on me, breath of God	295	596	370	67
Spirit of the living God	308	619	395	613
There's a spirit in the air	329	616	398	
Enemy of apathy		593	393	
Loving Spirit	326	597		
Spirit of God, unseen as the wind		600	394	1351
O day of joy and wonder		582		
Holy Spirit, hear us		599		
Holy wisdom, lamp of learning		604		
Spirit of truth and grace		608		
We sing a love that sets all people free		622		
When deep despair casts out all light			399	

RS – *Rejoice & Sing* | CH4 – *Church Hymnary 4* | StF – *Singing the Faith* | MP – *Mission Praise*

From Further Afield

Whilst it's in all the hymnbooks few congregations know the lovely Plainsong hymn *Come Holy Ghost Our Souls inspire*. You might want to play this just before the service starts asking the congregation to either sing along or listen – but either way to make it a prayer.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YD6a77INAk>

This, lively hymn *Be Still and Know* (not the one you think you know) would make a good song to play at the end of worship. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eu32TfUi4BA>