

Sunday Morning Resources

Sunday 5 May 2024 - The Sixth Sunday of Easter

Lectioary Readings (depending on the kind of service you are leading, you may use one or more of the following readings – however, you **must** use the gospel reading, as this is what the homily is based on)

Isaiah 55.1-11; Acts 10.44-end (this must be either first or second reading); Psalm 98; I John 5.1-6; John 15.9-17

Homily

Today's homily has been written by Amanda Tuck, LLM in the Orwell Group Benefice

Acts 10.44-end – **Testimony and Empowerment.**

Today in Acts 10: 44 we find Peter telling Gentiles, foreigners, people not considered “one of us”, all about Jesus. It's the **only** story Peter really wants to tell, that remarkable and extraordinary story of Jesus. Peter, now filled by the power of the Spirit, is speaking of Jesus not just to his friends, his family, his associates, but importantly to Gentiles.

Strangers.

Foreigners.

Talking to unlikely people like Cornelius, the Roman soldier convert.

How Peter has changed. How Cornelius has changed too.

If we are honest, perhaps when we have been away on holiday, or living abroad, we may have been foreigners. How does it feel? What difference does it make for us not to feel we belong?

In a few words here in Acts Peter gladly tells listeners of Jesus's earthly story. We can imagine him telling and retelling Jesus's story with excitement, bringing in colourful details designed to encourage his listeners to see things differently. Peter is asking them to take an alternative view of life as seen through Jesus's window of love.

Peter had developed a new, personal faith. He now understood so much more than ever before. Peter had developed a reverent hold of everything which had happened; finally understanding the meaning of his life in the light, in the Spirit of God.

Peter, as an observer; a participant in Jesus's ministry, now **SAW** with God. He, like so many of us, had gone through his period of doubt, dissatisfaction, disorientation. In his time of revelation, he needed to tell everyone his unique and powerful story.

Peter, resting with God, even in the eye of the Roman storm, told Jesus's story. This story included Jesus's terrible death **and** his glorious resurrection.

Peter encouraged his hearers not just to listen passively, but to bear **testimony**, in other words to tell everyone the truth. He wanted to share his gift of faith. Jesus was indeed sent by God **for** everyone.

I wonder how Peter the Fisherman felt in this new role. Who might have been looking after his fishing business, do we think? Did he find it easy to bear testimony himself, to lead, to preach and teach in an occupied land?

Then something amazing happens.

We learn in today's Acts reading that the Holy Spirit visits these people, the foreigners, the Gentiles. The Spirit enters people who were not of the Jewish faith. Peter's hearers then spoke in tongues. In other words, they spoke in many languages they had never used before and used those strange languages to praise God. They all bore **testimony**.

Here we encounter things we don't understand. They don't fit into our constructs, our paradigms, our worldviews or thought systems. There is no way to properly explain, to capture this event in words. We must simply stand in awe and see this amazing event as an eye of the storm moment.

It was as if people present were all being **baptised** by the Holy Spirit. Bathed by the power of the Spirit, not immersed in ordinary water. It was as if there were no barriers between God and Gentile Baptism, just as there are no barriers to prevent us basking in the power of God's love.

No gaps in wonder and awe between heaven and God's Kingdom on earth.

In Acts we discover that the Holy Spirit had **already** been experienced by believers in Jerusalem (in Acts 2) and in Samaria in (Acts 8).

Here in today's reading, we witness the Holy Spirit is being felt by Romans, and to people hailing from India, Arabia and elsewhere in the (then known), world. The gospel Spirit, offering profound joy and defying all rational explanations, was spreading like wildfire!

In the Nicene Creed we hear that the Holy Spirit is *the Lord and Giver of Life*. In the beginning it was the **Spirit** which first visualised creation and breathed life into it. We can imagine a mountain-top view with God somehow seeing all the beauty of the earth. The Spirit works to breathe new life into all of us too. The many gifts of the Spirit will flow freely into our lives-if we open ourselves to God's creative project.

This same creative Spirit acted within Jesus in the tomb. It passes seamlessly into each of us if we are prepared to follow Jesus.

Martin Luther talked of the Holy Spirit *breathing life into him through the Gospel*, but there are so many other ways in which the Spirit works here today. The Spirit can and does move continually through the mess of human history. It moves into the struggles of human politics and into the ugliness of human injustice and bigotry, even into the tragedy of human violence and war.

Is Jesus, even today, working in the world through his spirit-filled followers, whoever they may be?

There were, there are, no longer ethnic, geographical, moral, or cultural barriers to prevent people being offered God's love, God's forgiveness, God's new life. There we witness a Gospel invitation open to all.

God, through the power of the gospel story and the Holy Spirit welcomes, forgives, and transforms anyone's life, if we are willing to welcome him. You don't have to be a part of any exclusive club, family, or tribe. God loves, forgives, welcomes everyone from everywhere.

If we, as Christians, are to speak wisely of God as King and about Jesus as Lord, **we** need also to speak of something radically new and different. We **also** need to encounter the Holy Spirit, and think about what this extraordinary concept, **the Holy Spirit**, means to us in our lives.

I wonder what comes to mind for you when you hear the phrase, "Holy Spirit"? Is it for you associated with some strange magic or might the Spirit be something you have felt in your lives?

By the time Acts was written Jesus had already come into the world, died, and been raised, of course. Things were radically different in a newly transformed world. But some things remained the same as ever. People needed to gather to reaffirm their faith in worship, to join with God and others in compassion, bringing to his service their heads, hearts, eyes, ears, and **their** Spirits.

Jesus remains a fundamental element in our creator God. This God does not destroy the traditional Jewish wisdom but completes the world through the power of the Holy Spirit.

God's Holy Spirit in Jesus is the refreshment, the completion, of the ancient and fundamental Jewish idea of a creator God who breathed the Holy Spirit into creation. The same Holy Spirit who was present at Creation was there at Jesus's Baptism, in his tomb and at Pentecost.

The Holy Spirit is with us here today. It is fundamental, an aspect of God's working in the way the world is.

But this aspect of God is far from simple. Real things are not simple, as any scientist will tell you. They may **seem** simple enough, like a fire or a dove or a wind, but look closely and they are not.

In "Mere Christianity" C.S Lewis called God *the Something Behind the Material Universe*. An unknown and unknowable power. The Holy Spirit is a vital element in God's amazing ancient project of salvation. The Holy Spirit is working as part of a new framework of relationships which God has created through Jesus, and in which we, in turn, are asked to re-create here as disciples.

The presence of the Holy Spirit is a crucial element in true Christian Life. This spirit is not some abstract **thing**. Indeed, the Holy Spirit is not primarily a **thing** that God gives us. Rather, the Holy Spirit is a way of God giving **of himself**. Much more special than a solid gift.

In giving of his son, Jesus Christ, God gives himself. The Spirit, although powerful, is not a **force**, but the essence of a **person** being offered.

The Spirit pours love into our hearts as a transformational essence. Not like a divine postman, leaving letters on our mats and moving on, but via a loving God offering us opportunities for new life which are open to us.

Opening our eyes to the glory of Christ's Spirit in our lives.

So, we are empowered to testify, with a warmth of certain love, enabling us to live in the Holy Spirit.

May we all feel such empowerment in our lives.

Amen

Ways to Engage all Generations

When different generations are gathered together in worship there is an opportunity to build relationships and to encounter God in our conversations as we build relationships and learn from each other no matter what our ages, stage of life or faith and for all present to feel included. Adding some wondering questions to the service at an appropriate moment can help to do this.

Wondering Questions: Some wondering questions that may help to engage all generations to ponder and explore during the talk, service or during the week may include (three or so) of the following style of questions:

- I wonder what your favourite part of the story/passage is? I wonder why that is?
- I wonder who your favourite character is? I wonder why that is?
- I wonder how _____ felt or I wonder how _____ felt when _____ happened?
- I wonder how you feel about _____?
- I wonder where you are in this story?
- I wonder what part of the story is about you?
- I wonder what the [tree, pearl, coin] could really be?
- I wonder why _____ said _____?
- I wonder what we can learn about God in this story?

Suggested intercessions

God is present with us now here in (X church).

Let us bring him our prayers and our concerns.

Both for God's Church, for the world and for the people he has created.

Loving God, breathe new life into your Church here on Earth.

So that we, too, like Peter, may speak with passion of your love for the world.

May we be willing to testify, to follow, to suffer and to sacrifice.

Spirit of God

Let your Will be done.

Loving God, we pray today for your peace in all the troubled areas of your world.

We pray that people may feel your Spirit and learn to work together in cooperation.

May they be sensitive to the needs of others and recognise you in cultural differences.

Spirit of God

Let your Will be done.

Loving God, breathe on us the Spirit of patience and forgiveness.

May these qualities be present in our homes, our churches, our communities and in our relationships.

May we all learn to cherish and respect one another, seeing Christ in people.

May we always act in the Spirit of generosity,

Sharing those gifts which you have given us.

Spirit of God

Let your Will be done.

Loving God, breathe your Spirit into the souls of those who are sick and dying.

Comfort them and make them welcome,

Knowing that death is the door through which we find you.

Anticipating the joy of eternal life as lived through your Spirit.

Spirit of God

Let your Will be done

Loving God, breathe your Spirit into our daily lives here in (X),

So that with you, secure in our faith,

We rejoice on our journey every step of the way.

Willingly sharing your love with others in our community,

Whatever difficulties we may encounter on our life's journey,

We know you always walk with us.

Spirit of God

Let your Will be done.

Loving God, be with those known to you who need your comfort.

Be present for troubled people we know and name here in our hearts.

Be with those who need your encouragement.

So that in dark and painful times

They experience strong spiritual growth in their times of trouble.

Spirit of God

Let your Will be done.

Loving, God, we thank you for loving us.

You passed with the Spirit through death to new life.

We rejoice in the power of your Spirit among us.

And in your victory over the powers of evil.

Merciful father, **Accept these prayers for the sake of your son, our Saviour, Jesus Christ. Amen**

Suggested hymns/songs

Breathe on me, Breath of God.

Spirit of God as Strong as the Wind (Skye Boat Song)

Come down O love Divine

Jesus's Love is very Wonderful

When the Spirit of the Lord

God's Spirit is in my Heart

Thy Had, O God has guided

Dance in Your Spirit

Activities to accompany the service:

If you are looking for resources to accompany the service for engaging younger children, then there are lots of online resources. The following free to access/download resources may be useful starting points:

- <https://flamecreativekids.blogspot.com/>
- <https://www.pinterest.co.uk/MessyChurchBRF/>
- <https://www.faithinkids.org/>
- [reflectionary.org](https://www.reflectionary.org/) – lectionary-based resources
- [engageworship](https://www.engageworship.com/) – in particular 'Area 52' for lectionary-based material
- <https://www.bdeducation.org.uk/product-category/primary-age-5-11/>
(weekly@lectionary resource)