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Welcome to worship this Pentecost Sunday!

**As we join in worship and meet our wonderful Father
we pray the Holy Spirit may minister to each of you!**

Graham Kendrick has written and recorded a new hymn during the Covid-19 lockdown period in the UK.

LISTEN “Creator Spirit” (Veni Creator Spiritus)

as God welcomes us into His presence

PRAYER

When Pentecost Day arrived, they were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound from heaven like the howling of a fierce wind filled the entire house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be individual flames of fire alighting on each one of them. They were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages as the Spirit enabled them to speak.

Holy Spirit, making life alive, moving in all things, root of all being, cleansing God's creation of every impurity, effacing guilt, anointing wounds. You are lustrous and praiseworthy life, you waken and re-awaken everything that is. *(Hildegard of Bingen)*

Come, Holy Spirit, come!

Come, Holy Spirit, come!

HYMN of INVITATION Spirit of the Living God, Fall afresh on me

PRAYER

The prayer below was collected by Alexander Carmichael as he travelled the Western Isles of Scotland in the 19th century. Carmichael sat, it is said, around peat fires and listened to Islanders recite the poems, songs, prayers and blessings they had learned from their ancestors.

These were not the prayers of the established Church in Scotland.

They were drawn from an oral tradition that had survived underground since the Celtic Christian tradition was censured 1,200 years earlier in favour of uniform Roman practice and theology. This is the prayer:

In name of the Holy Spirit of Grace,
 In name of the Father of the City of Peace,
 In name of Jesus who takes death off us,
 Oh, in name of the Three who shield us in every need,
 If well you have found us tonight,
 Seven times better may you leave us without harm,
 O bright white Moon of the seasons.

LISTEN Come Holy Spirit Come ... Hallelujah

REFLECTION

We've come to worship God,
 who makes streams flow from rock,
 who turns the parched earth into springs of water,
 who sends the rain from heaven
 and makes the wilderness blossom and flourish.

The deer thirsts for flowing streams, so we too thirst for You, O God.
Our life-creating God, whose Son our Christ invited all and sundry who desire to quench their thirst, and promised to fill us with living water, gushing and spilling over, that the overflow will be a blessing to many.

“May this God’s desire be fulfilled in each of us today” is our prayer.

HYMN Because He lives, I can face tomorrow**READING Gospel of John 7:37-52**

On the final and climactic day of the Feast, Jesus took his stand. He cried out, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. Rivers of living water will brim and spill out of the depths of anyone who believes in me this way, just as the Scripture says." (*He said this in regard to the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were about to receive. The Spirit had not yet been given because Jesus had not yet been glorified.*)

Those in the crowd who heard these words were saying, "This has to be the Prophet." Others said, "He is the Messiah!" But others were saying, "The Messiah doesn't come from Galilee, does he? Don't the Scriptures tell us that the Messiah comes from David's line and from Bethlehem, David's village?" So there was a split in the crowd over him. Some went so far as wanting to arrest him, but no one laid a hand on him.

That's when the Temple police reported back to the high priests and Pharisees, who demanded, "Why didn't you bring him with you?"

The police answered, "Have you heard the way he talks? We've never heard anyone speak like this man."

The Pharisees said, "Are you carried away like the rest of the rabble? You don't see any of the leaders believing in him, do you? Or any from the Pharisees? It's only this crowd, ignorant of God's Law, that is taken in by him—and damned."

Nicodemus, the man who had come to Jesus earlier and was both a ruler and a Pharisee, spoke up. "Does our Law decide about a man's guilt without first listening to him and finding out what he is doing?"

But they cut him off. "Are you also campaigning for the Galilean? Examine the evidence. See if any prophet ever comes from Galilee." **-end-**

HYMN Open my eyes that I may see

MESSAGE

Today is Pentecost Sunday, 50 days after Easter. 10 days prior to the first Pentecost, moments before Jesus returned to the Father, He told His disciples, *return to Jerusalem and stay there until the Father sends you the gift He promised ... in a few days you will be baptised with the Holy Spirit.*

Remarkably, in our progression through the Gospel of John, we are at the final third of chapter 7 when Jesus mentions Pentecost!

Our passage today (v.37-52) starts with a time-marker, the “*On the last day, the climax of the Feast*”, referring to the 8-day Feast of Tabernacles. During the first seven days, water from the Pool of Siloam was carried in a golden pitcher and poured out at the altar to remind everyone, for 40 years, God miraculously provided water in the wilderness for a thirsty Israel, in transit towards a promised land. On the eighth and final day, no water was poured, only prayers for water were said, which reminded people, they were in the Promised Land, where springs of fresh sweet water was plentiful.

Over the past several chapters in John, we have witnessed religious leaders confronting Jesus on the finer points of the Law, not because they were seeking clarification, rather using confrontation, altercations and arguments, they tried to ridicule and discredit Him. The religious authorities held the Law (Moses’ Law) was supreme and there was no room for grace, love and compassion; the two simply could not co-exist.

John explains it in this way: “*The Torah (God’s Law) came through Moses, and unfailing love and truthfulness came through Jesus Christ.*”¹ God’s grace and Truth is seen in the Torah of Moses, but in Jesus the Jewish Christ, this is fully displayed.

Take a moment to understand this in perspective: the opposite of law was never grace, but law-less-ness. The opposite of grace was never the law, but disgrace.

¹ John 1:17

Our passage today is a challenging one, which can serve as an example — both negative and positive — for those of us who live during a time of religious rivalry and witness the clash between faith and disbelief.

John's main concern is to convey the importance of **belief**. To believe in Jesus, is to be made a child of God and heir to grace². To not believe in Jesus, is to sin. How? We discredit God and humiliate Him, tarnishing His plan of salvation through Christ, making it to be a lie.

To believe Jesus is the Christ, is to accept the reason He died, and to accept that God conquered death through Jesus' resurrection. For anyone who believes in Jesus as the Christ, death is not a final, unknown frontier; to them, death is the assured gateway into eternity with God!

Before we get to Jesus' main message in this narrative, let's spend a few moments exploring one of our major stumbling blocks that holds us back from believing Jesus is the Christ: partial and incomplete knowledge! It is the height of arrogance to believe, *what we know, is all there is to know*. This attitude not only blinds us to Truth, it prevents us from accepting Truth.

John exposes this tension between, *what we know is all there is to know*, and seeking Truth, which is beyond everything we know.

We see this in peoples' divided opinion of Jesus: *Some said, surely this man is the Prophet we have been expecting. Others said, "He is the Messiah." Still others said, "But he can't be! Will the Messiah come from Galilee? For the Scriptures clearly state that the Messiah will be born of the royal line of David, in Bethlehem, the village where King David was born."*³

Not only did they have their facts wrong (Jesus was indeed born in Bethlehem) and showed no interest in learning the truth, they were showing a social bias among Jews that everything good came from Jerusalem, where the Temple existed, where God met His people through the Chief Priest and forgave them

² see chapter 1

³ John 7:40-43

their sin. Nothing good could ever come out of Galilee, because common, hardworking, sweaty people lived there!

Remember Nathaniel's response to Philip's invitation, *we have found the very person Moses and the prophets wrote about, and His name is Jesus?* Nathaniel's response was to rebuffed Philip, *Can anything good come from Nazareth?*, demonstrating the prevalence of this attitude across the land.

We have the same attitude! Everything good comes out of London; the good and comfortable life is found in the south. Can anything good come from the north? Surely many still remember this prevalent attitude not too long ago! Thankfully this attitude has changed and continues to change with significant investment into creating "the northern powerhouse".

We see this attitude when the Temple guards were reprimanded by the religious authorities for not arresting Jesus. Their defence?

"Have you heard the way He talks? We've never heard anyone speak like this man."

What happens next illustrates the attitude, *what we know, is all there is to know.*

The religious authorities rebuked the Temple guards, *"Are you carried away like the rest of the rabble? You don't see any of the leaders believing in him, do you? Or any from among the Pharisees? It's only this crowd, (who are) ignorant of God's Law, that is taken in by him—and God's curse is on them."*

Every word they spoke was dripping with contempt for everyone, other than themselves. When one of their own, Nicodemus, posed a question about justice in the law they upheld so rigorously, they mocked and made fun of him, cutting him off. *"Are you from Galilee, or are you also campaigning for the Galilean? Examine the evidence. See for yourself if any prophet ever comes from Galilee."*

This acrimony, animosity and hostility arose from Jesus' declaration at the climax, the last day of the feast of Tabernacles, when the pouring of water had ended, *"If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. Rivers of living water will*

brim and spill out of the depths of anyone who believes in Me this way, just as the Scripture says.”

Writing 60 years later, John adds a parenthetical note to help us understand what Jesus meant, *(He said this in regard to the Holy Spirit, whom those who believed in Him were about to receive. The Spirit had not yet been given because Jesus had not yet been glorified.)*

In the account of Pentecost (Acts 2), we learn this about the Holy Spirit:

- He cannot be controlled or brandished by human intent: *“suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind”. Jesus had earlier told Nicodemus, You know well enough how the wind blows, this way and that. You hear it rustling through the trees, but you have no idea where it comes from or where it’s headed next. That’s the way it is with everyone ‘born from above’ by The Wind, which is Holy Spirit from God.”*
- He gives power to speak Truth into the hands of the young, the old, both men and women, and enslaved people, *“Even upon my slaves, both men and women, in those days I will pour out my Spirit”*.
- He gives us a language to speak specifically about *“the wonderful things God has done”* (v.10). Reciting creeds and doctrines are good in reminding us Truths about God, but familiarity does breed contempt. Learning to speak *“with the help of the Holy Spirit”*, everything we utter, God is always glorified.

I trust we can now appreciate the reason for the religious leaders’ acrimony towards Jesus: the Holy Spirit releases us from a strict adherence to the law as dictated by religious authorities; the Holy Spirit guides us to achieve the purpose of God, as He moves towards the establishment of His Kingdom on earth.

Pentecost is a powerful reminder to us the Church that,

- The Holy Spirit empowers each individual to speak Truth, breathing Life into dry bones sticking out from the sand (stuck in old ways), which often are not God's ways. God is moving and so should we, along with Him.
- The Holy Spirit unites us as one, as He is one with the Father. Julian of Norwich wrote, *'the love of God creates in us such a "one-ing", that when it is truly seen, no person can separate themselves from another person.'* We pray, we the Church may live and demonstrate this oneness.
- Jesus' invitation makes sense when we realise, thirst is a lack of something in us. Thirst is an emptiness that is crying out to be filled, a need longing to be satisfied. On the last day of the feast when no more water was poured, Jesus was saying, *There's no more water at the temple and in the rituals you love. I have the water you are longing for. "If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink (and be satisfied)."*
- Finally, we are not to hoard the gift of the Holy Spirit to ourselves; its nature is to fill our emptiness, satisfy our longing, then *"Rivers of living water will brim and spill out of the depths of anyone who believes in me this way, just as the Scripture says"*. God's gift of the Holy Spirit is a blessing to us, and through us, a blessing to many.

Pentecost invites us to move away from theory of reciting creeds, beliefs and denominational affiliations, and practice listening to God, in His Word and in prayer, letting ourselves be guided by the Holy Spirit into God's ways of living and thinking.

It is a discipline worth cultivating.

Shall we make a commitment to do this? **AMEN.**

LISTEN Where the Spirit of the Lord is

BENEDICTION

We leave this time and space of delightful worship in the presence of God. So much of the road ahead is uncertain, the path constantly changing, but we know some things that are as solid and sure as the ground beneath our feet, and the sky above our heads.

We are assured of God's unchanging love for us.

We are assured of Christ's resurrection and victory over death, and

We are assured of the Holy Spirit's presence with us always, guiding us in God's ways and holding us together as one body in Christ.

Until we meet we again, go in peace and live to glorify God in all you do.

AMEN.

HYMN The Church's Blessing over the United Kingdom

Go in peace to serve your Lord God in all you do!