

Church at home

East Leake Methodist Church 2021

Sit comfortably in a quiet place and prepare, start with a brief period of silence, turning your mind and spirit towards God. You may want to have a cross or candle in view as a focus.

Pentecost

❖ Call to worship (Chris)

Come as God's Spirit calls us.

Lord, we come.

Come as God's spirit calls us in gentleness.

Lord, we come.

Come as God's spirit calls us to worship.

Lord, we come.

Come as God's spirit calls us to action.

Lord, we come.

Lord,

help us to look out and listen for your Holy Spirit.

May we welcome you with open hearts and minds.

Call us, inspire us, surprise us and challenge us.

Give us confidence and calm assurance.

Lead us to your power and love.

Spirit of compassion, **we bring you our hearts.**

Spirit of discernment, **we bring you our choices.**

Spirit of wisdom, **we bring you our minds.**

Spirit of boldness, **we bring you our words.**

Spirit of fulfilment, **we bring you our longings.**

Spirit of abundance, **we bring you our resources.**

Spirit of creation, **we bring you our lives.**

❖ Taizé Chant – Come Holy Spirit (Maggie)

'When people come together to pray, meditative singing can help everyone to participate and to stay together in waiting on God. Using just a few words, they express a fundamental reality that can quickly be grasped by the mind. As the words are sung over many times, this reality can gradually sink into one's whole being.'

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=us-v4slsUX4>

❖ Opening Prayers (Chris)

We praise you, God of all time,
for speaking to us through the tongues of Pentecost,

for stirring our longings with the excitement of Pentecost,
for uniting our communities with the inclusiveness of Pentecost.
Fill our lives, we pray, with the enormity of Pentecost,
until they overflow with compassion and commitment
to care for and celebrate all creation to the glory of your name.

Living God,
thank you for the energy of Pentecost,
for the promises fulfilled,
for the lives changed,
for the hearts touched,
for the power unleashed,
for the overflowing of your Spirit into our world.
In Jesus' name.

Amen.

❖ **Prayer of Confession and Assurance of forgiveness**

Forgive us, Creator God,
when we have not heard your voice in the song of the birds
and the rustle of leaves:
Open the ears of our hearts.
When we have not seen you in the grandeur of the mountains
and the rhythm of the waves:

Open the eyes of our hearts.
When we have not rejoiced at the vibrance of spring or the colours of autumn:
Unlock the joy in our hearts.
When we have stifled your Spirit and confined your love:
Deepen the love in our hearts.
Forgive us, and release in us the true Spirit of Pentecost.
Today and always.

Gracious God, ignite our prayers
with the life-giving fire of Pentecost,
that we may not fear our inadequacy,
our hesitancy or our doubt,
but bring before you all that we are,
all that we have been, and all that we can be.
May we know that we can never aim high enough,
and never conceive anything complete enough,
to prepare us for all you would bless us with –
individually, as communities and as nations.
Help us to gather together and wait for you afresh,
trusting your love, mercy and forgiveness.

Amen.

❖ **Reading Acts 2:1-38 (Angela) + slides**

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. 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.

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

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

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. These people are not drunk, as you suppose. It's only nine in the morning! No, this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel:

"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.

Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy.

I will show wonders in the heavens above and signs on the earth below, blood and fire and billows of smoke.

The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and glorious day of the Lord.

And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.'

"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, "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.

❖ Saints Alive (Rose)

Roger Jones (a Methodist) began composing musicals in the 1970's telling Bible stories and Christian truths in a fun and accessible way. Saints Alive is a musical telling the story of the birth of the Church on the day of Pentecost, showing the dramatic change which took place in the apostles, turning them from frightened and hopeless men to people who turned the world upside down

<https://youtu.be/SGgHkD0UmrM>

❖ Address (Roger) – the Pentecost experience.

*The dove descending breaks the air
With flame of incandescent terror
Of which the tongues declare
The one discharge from sin and error.
The only hope, or else despair
Lies in the choice of pyre of pyre—
To be redeemed from fire by fire.*

*Who then devised the torment? Love.
Love is the unfamiliar Name
Behind the hands that wove
The intolerable shirt of flame
Which human power cannot remove.
We only live, only suspire
Consumed by either fire or fire*

Thomas Stearns Eliot was an American, arguably the greatest poet of the 20th century, and a High Anglican. His poetry is shot through with religious references, quotations from religious philosophers, and prayers of the faithful. His poems deal with the big issues, the worries, and concerns of humanity, as it tries to puzzle its way in a complex and uncertain world. Poetry has been described as "what oft was thought, but ne'er so well expressed", and gives us access to the deep-felt emotions and the senses in a way that expands the understanding of our reasoning mind.

This poem is a fragment from the bigger poem "Little Gidding" – a little village in Cambridgeshire which was home to an Anglican religious community, which Eliot visited, established in 1626 by Nicholas Farrar. It attempts to express the experience of Pentecost with all its contradictions of peace and terror, love, and fear, and above all, a religious choice. The dove of peace brings "incandescent terror"; we are faced with a choice to be redeemed from the fire of our human passions, or possibly hell,

by the redemption that is brought by the Spirit of God experienced as fire – just as the early disciples experienced it. The torment of our choice is not some malicious punishment of a vengeful God but has love at its heart. We are faced again with a choice, we cannot remove the experience, and so we can only live “consumed by either fire or fire” – the fire of our earthly existence, that will consume us in death, or the fire of the Holy Spirit that will empower us to eternal life.

The key point that I want to address this morning is about experience. The event of Pentecost was just that – an almost unintelligible experience that empowered the disciples, and that established the Church. As the reading from Acts records it turned around the followers of Jesus. The disciples became apostles – the learners became the teachers. Frightened people became bold speakers. The intelligible words amazed the people and spoke of a universal understanding of God that reversed the confusion and separation of the Tower of Babel. The crowd confronted with the significance of Christ, of the Incarnation, were moved to repentance. “What must we do”, they cried. “Believe!”, replied Peter. The early Church spent much of its time in the first years of its existence trying to understand what the Holy Spirit was. The Holy Spirit was seen as the endorsement of actions undertaken by the apostles that moved faith in Christ from being a Jewish sect to a universal Church. Peter’s experience at the house of Cornelius, and the story that we read recently about Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch are both confirmed by the presence of the Holy Spirit. How that Holy Spirit manifested itself varied in the experience of the Church. Paul, in writing to the Corinthians who had become deeply divided by factions, encourages them to understand that although different members of the Church, empowered by the Spirit exhibit different gifts, and different roles, they are nevertheless manifestations of the same Spirit of God and that they are to be used to build up the Church in unity not division. And here is a lesson for us. Our experiences of the Holy Spirit in our lives are not to be taken as simply a personal matter, but are to be used, talked about, and understood only in the wider congregation. That is why I felt it important when we were afflicted with the pandemic that the worship of the Church community should continue – even if we were separated physically for reasons of personal safety. So the Church at Home services, the Zoom services, and the services in this Church seem to me to be essential so that we could worship and celebrate our various experiences of the Spirit and be empowered by the Spirit for future action. This service has brought together individual experiences to make this act of worship happen. It matters.

Experiencing the Spirit in our lives can be confusing – I talked recently about the complexity and uncertainty of human existence, and it seemed to strike a chord with many of you. It spoke to your experience. The early Church puzzled through trying to understand how their experiences of Jesus, and of the Holy Spirit in their lives, related to their understanding of the one God. Our creeds, with their doctrines of the Trinity, are one of the legacies that they have left us. Next week is Trinity Sunday, and Chris may well find herself having to wrestle with this difficult concept – one that is not grounded in Scripture, for the only verses that could possibly relate to it are suspiciously missing from the earliest manuscripts. But the Church would not possibly have invented such complexities if they had been looking for a simple statement of faith. Our understanding of the Trinity is essentially based in our experience of Jesus Christ, and the empowerment of the Holy Spirit. So sometimes the best expression of our experience comes through music, art, or literature such as poetry rather than through theological analysis. For example, what are we doing during our intercessory prayers? We can’t be telling God something that he doesn’t already know, and our prayers can’t be really seen as asking God to change his mind and do something about an unsatisfactory situation. But in our experience

intercessory prayer works – works because we bring before God those areas where change or a better outcome is necessary and express our hope that through the empowerment of the Spirit those who are actively involved, which may include ourselves, will find a solution to the issues that is in accordance with God's love.

We talk of the empowering Spirit, but does this manifest itself in ways that the world can see? It does. Some while ago I refer to the last book that Rabbi Jonathan Sacks wrote before his death – *Morality*. I have referred to it in previous addresses, so you will recall (which is a polite way of saying that almost certainly won't, so I'll remind you) that Rabbi Sacks was explaining how a stable society needed a political system which was just; an economic system that was fair; and a common morality which established what was true and right. He deplored what he saw as the corruption of political systems to self-interest, favours to friends, lies and "false news", and a lack of personal responsibility. He felt that an economic system which created manifest inequality was too heavily relied on to provide "solutions" to what were essentially issues of fairness and justice and could not bear the burden that we had thrust upon it. Above all, he felt that a failure of communal morality which had replaced "We" by "I" as the centre of its ethical standard, and where there was a lack of a common standard of behaviour, was undermining society. As he developed his arguments, he turned to consider the role of religious faith and experience in such a society. Where religious faith expressed itself not as individual but as a community faith there was the potential for strength – and that communal faith was seen most visibly in a common act of worship, so just as I said, maintaining a common act of worship even in these trying times is important. But he also referred to evidence from the Pew Research Group (the Pew is a proper name, not a suggestion that the research group is in any way religiously based) which showed that where individuals had a religious faith, and attended common worship regularly, then they were significantly more likely to be involved in community activity, and express altruism towards the needs of others, even at the cost to themselves, than in the general population. The driver of that love and concern for others was religious experience.

During the current pandemic we have seen just how strongly the community can pull together in solidarity in the face of the existential threat of disease. Healthcare workers and social care staff have placed themselves at risk to look after the needs of others. People have contributed generously to raise funds to meet the needs of communities and individuals. People who had only nodding acquaintance with their neighbours have gone out of their way to ensure that the most vulnerable were careful and looked after, not only in their physical but also in their social and mental needs. And if that Pew Research Group conclusion is correct, I'm prepared to hazard that such activity has been disproportionately led by those with a strong religious faith and experience, from whatever faith they come. At the heart of that experience is our common worship of the living God. This is not to say there have been people who do not express any religious faith who have been motivated to offer themselves selflessly in our current circumstances. But faith, and our experience of the Holy Spirit in our lives, grounds us with a strength that is essential for our continuing social, cultural, and spiritual life in the face of a continuing level of uncertainty and worry – and not a little fear for the future.

So I want to end this by quoting again from TS Eliot – this time from his poem "The Dry Salvages", which seems an unusual name but refers to a rocky outcrop in the sea off New England called "Les trois Sauvages" a hazard to frail ships tossed about in a stormy sea as the waves break in white, foamy, towers against the rocks, a metaphor for the dangers and uncertainties of life. In this section of the poem Eliot refers to the tendency of human beings in the face of uncertainty and complexity to

try anything to predict the future, and contrast this with the eye of faith that seeks God at the intersection of “the timeless with time”, and finds deep within itself that sense of the presence of God which we see as the action of the Holy Spirit, but also commends the need for faithful observance as we struggle to understand the mystery that is God's action in our world.

*To communicate with Mars, converse with Spirits,
To report the behaviour of the sea monster,
Describe the horoscope, haruspicate or scry,
Observe disease in signatures, evoke
Biography from the wrinkles of the palm
And tragedy from fingers; release omens
By sortilege, or tea leaves, riddle the inevitable
With playing cards, fiddle with pentagrams
Or barbituric acids, or dissect
The recurrent image into pre-conscious terrors—
To explore the womb, or tomb, or dreams; all these are usual
Pastimes and drugs, and features of the press:
And always will be, some of them especially
When there is distress of nations and perplexity
Whether on the shores of Asia, or in the Edgware Road.
Men's curiosity searches past and future
And clings to that dimension.
But to apprehend
The point of intersection of the timeless
With time, is an occupation for the saint—
No occupation either, but something given
And taken, in a lifetime's death in love,
Ardour and selflessness and self-surrender.
For most of us, there is only the unattended
Moment, the moment in and out of time,
The distraction fit, lost in a shaft of sunlight,
The wild thyme unseen, or the winter lightning
Or the waterfall, or music heard so deeply
That it is not heard at all, but you are the music
While the music lasts.
These are only hints and guesses,
Hints followed by guesses; and the rest Is prayer, observance, discipline, thought and
action.
The hint half guessed, the gift half understood, is Incarnation.
Here the impossible union
Of spheres of existence is actual,
Here the past and future
Are conquered, and reconciled.*

❖ **Hymn StF 372 Come down, O love divine**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=edK3Vv7Qwo>

❖ Prayers of Intercession (Bryan)

In wonder let us pray
to the almighty and everlasting God.

We pray for the Church, that in constant prayerfulness
Christians may be attentive and receptive
to the Holy Spirit.

Silence

Father almighty:
may your Spirit fill us with life.

We pray for the world,
with all its mistakes and tragedies,
that God's active Spirit
will bring order,
serenity and hope.

Silence

Father almighty:
may your Spirit fill us with life.

We pray for those whose lives
are darkened by guilt,
resentment and despair;
for those who live violent and cruel lives;
for drug dealers
and all who corrupt young minds;
that God's generous Spirit of love
will bring light to their hearts.

Silence

Father almighty:
may your Spirit fill us with life.

We pray for our loved ones
and for anyone we find difficult to love;
that God's Spirit living in us
will increase our love
for each other.

Silence

Father almighty:
may your Spirit fill us with life.

Alive to the Holy Spirit, we name those we know who are in any particular need.

Silence

Father, accept these prayers, through Jesus Christ our Lord, who taught us when we pray to say.....

❖ **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 who 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.**

❖ **Hymn StF 59 Shine, Jesus, shine (Lesley)**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=op17raOTXbk>

I thought that it would be appropriate for Pentecost and I like to sing it! As I am at home in isolation I will be singing it very loudly. You might even be able to hear me in our Church, which does shine! Lesley.

❖ **Blessing (Chris)**

Lord, for tomorrow's world,
we pray for the coming of your Spirit.
Lord, for today's world,
we pray for the coming of your Spirit.
Lord, for our world and our lives,
we pray for the coming of your Spirit.

Holy Spirit, send us out.
Gentle Spirit, calm our fears.
Spirit of truth, lead us to a broader vision of your work.
Spirit of strength, in our weaknesses, make us strong.
Spirit of power, show us when and how to act for you.
Holy Spirit, send us out.
Amen.