

## Sermon Pentecost Sunday 2026

### Acts 2:1-12 John 20:19-23

It was the first day of the Jewish festival, Pentecost. The disciples were gathered together, along with countless other people from near and far. The disciples had an experience of the power of the Holy Spirit flowing through them as they had never experienced before. We are told this took place seven weeks after the resurrection of Jesus.

This was not the first experience the disciples had of receiving the Holy Spirit. In our Gospel reading we hear that soon after his resurrection, Jesus appeared to his disciples, breathed on them and said, *'Receive the Holy Spirit.'* John 20:22. The difference on this occasion as recorded in Acts, is that it was very much a more dramatic happening.

This experience the disciples had was manifested in three ways – by a strong wind (*'Suddenly, there was a sound from heaven like the roaring of a mighty windstorm.'* John 20:2), tongues of fire which appeared above their heads (*'Then what looked like flames or tongues of fire appeared and settled on each one of them.'* John 20:3), and speaking in tongues (*'And everyone was filled with the Holy Spirit and began speaking in other languages.'* John 20:4).

This brings me to the first point I want to make regarding the power of the Holy Spirit. This can be something quite dramatic and indeed life-changing, as it was for the disciples. We think of Paul's experience of Christ on the road to Damascus. It doesn't get any more dramatic than that, and there are many people who have had life-changing experiences. But for many people, their experience of the Holy Spirit, is a somewhat more moderate sense of God's presence and power, and different churches will reflect that contrast in their worship.

There is the story of a man who came to an Anglican church service and was waving his arms around and speaking in tongues, and generally disrupting the worship, as it was being practised in that particular church. After some time, an usher came forward and asked him to desist. The man replied, *'But I've got the Spirit.'* The usher replied, *'That may be so, sir, but you didn't get it here.'*

For the disciples, it was certainly a dramatic experience, and as a result of that experience, they were now equipped with the power to teach, preach and heal. They went their separate ways, setting up communities of people who believed in and worshipped Jesus. These communities of people initially met in homes for their worship but as their numbers grew they had to construct special buildings to accommodate everyone. They called these buildings *'churches.'*

And so our Church, and by that I mean the Christian Church of a vast community of believers was born. It all began at Pentecost, which is why we regard Pentecost as the birthday of our Church. Happy birthday, Church!

Let's look at it this way. Up to this point, the Day of Pentecost, we have a record of Jesus' life – his birth, his ministry, his death and so very important, his resurrection. This is, if you like, his history, and it is a history that leads us into a belief, a faith in this unique person. But then we need to have the inspiration, the spur, the tools and the direction to transform that belief into deeds and action, into accomplishment that reflects this belief.

It is rather like setting out on a journey in a car. We know where we are going but until we fill up the car with petrol, or perhaps today electricity, we are not going anywhere. The Holy Spirit is our fuel.

This brings me to a very important point. I referred to *'this accomplishment that reflects our belief.'* Just what is this accomplishment? For the disciples it was preaching, teaching, healing and setting up Christ's church. I don't believe Christ expects us to go quite that far, though you could say that he expects us to grow his church, but that's probably another issue. However, he did give us a very simple command, which actually goes a long way towards embracing his expectation of us in terms of building his church, and that command is simply *'to love our neighbour.'* It is very difficult to get away from his command, isn't it?

Now what is interesting is that Pentecost highlights an aspect of this charge, and I refer to the word *'neighbour.'* It is interesting and very pertinent that the disciples received the Holy Spirit in the presence of people from a wide range of backgrounds and cultures. Surely there is a message there. They were equipped to go forth and minister to all and sundry, and to emphasise this, they received

this power surrounded by people who spoke a variety of languages, and the disciples themselves began speaking these languages. Surely, this is a ratification of just what the term 'neighbour' means. It's not just those who fit comfortably in our own little world – it embraces absolutely everyone.

There is the story of a young British couple who had gone to Africa on a colonial service, many years ago. In their first letter home, they wrote, *'From our house on the hill we look down on a valley filled with dozens of African families, all living in grass thatched-roof huts. Our nearest neighbours are 100 miles away at the next British post.'* Hello! Just who is your neighbour?

Pentecostal faith means being open to differences – different generations, races, faiths, nationalities, churches, social standings. In his 2003 book, 'The Dignity of Difference,' the then Chief Rabbi, Jonathan Sacks, writes, *'The test of faith is whether I can make room for difference. Can I recognise God in someone who is not my image? If I cannot, then I have made God in my image instead of allowing him to remake me in his.'*

I want to finish by focusing for a moment on what the Holy Spirit means to us on a personal level. The Holy Spirit is the power of God working in us, but it is also a sign of God's presence within us. I have made this point just recently, but I believe God is present in everyone one of us, after all, we are all God's children, created by him. It's just that not everyone acknowledges that presence, not everyone opens themselves to that presence. So the Holy Spirit is a rich source of power and goodness lying within each one of us, just waiting to be tapped. Let me tell you a story.

During the Depression many years ago, a man named Yates owned this ranch in the USA. Mr Yates wasn't able to make enough on his farming operation to pay the principal and interest on the mortgage, so he was in danger of losing his ranch. He and his family had to live on a government subsidy.

One day a seismographic crew from an oil company paid him a visit and told him that there might be oil under his land. They asked permission to drill an exploratory well, and he signed the appropriate contract.

They struck a huge oil reserve. The first well came in at 80,000 barrels a day. Many subsequent wells were more than twice as large, and Mr Yates owned it all. All those years when he and his family had been living hand to mouth, he was sitting on a proverbial goldmine, and he never knew it. It was only after he tapped into that rich vein was he able to reap the rewards.

A similar comparison can be made with the Holy Spirit, or in other words God's presence within us. Only when we tap into that presence do we receive the rewards. And just as Mr Yates had to have the presence of the oil revealed to him, so do we need to be guided, to be pointed in the right direction before we can become aware of God's presence and power.

So today, let's ask for that guidance, and we could do worse than ask God himself. Give it a go. The rewards are bountiful