

PENTECOST
19/5/24
CAVES BEACH

CALL TO WORSHIP

Holy Spirit, come amongst us!

Inspire our worship, strengthen our faith.

Holy Spirit, stay with us!

Deepen our fellowship, support our sharing.

Holy Spirit, challenge our discipleship!

Encourage us to venture out, give us the compassion of Jesus.

Holy Spirit, work through us!

Touch the downhearted with hope, move the dispirited with Love.

Opening Prayer

Soaring, flowing, questing, dancing,

the Holy Spirit leads us to praise.

Searching, finding, changing, challenging,

the Holy Spirit calls us to faithfulness.

Gently, calmly, simply, persistently,

the Holy Spirit invites us to reflection.

With perseverance, with encouragement, with joy, with urgency,

the Holy Spirit moves us to action. Come, Holy Spirit, and be with us, now and always! Amen.

HYMN 409 O breath of God

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M3bsgoPjcg4> Slightly different words

PRAYERS OF THANKSGIVING & CONFESSION

God, we are amazed, humbled, and thankful that the scriptures are filled with ordinary people's experiences of your surprising presence.

On the Day of Pentecost,

that small band, whose world had been broken apart, were filled with your Spirit and it changed their lives and the life of the world.

We thank you that that moment has been repeated in a million lives at a million times.

We thank you that every moment is ripe with the possibility of being the Day of Pentecost.

That every breath we take can be an inbreathing of the Spirit of transformation and that every ray of sunlight can be a refining fire.

God of truth,

Jesus promised that the Spirit would lead us into all truth.

But too often we are not willing to live in truth.

We so often prefer our fantasies.

The truth is sometimes hard to take.

The truth is sometimes too clarifying, too confronting.

We seek easy answers,

comforting lies,

dreams instead of reality.

Forgive us, God of truth.

And give us the courage to live in the truth that your Spirit brings.

Give us the courage to see the world,

each other, and ourselves,

as we really and truly are.

Remind us that the truth of the world is that it,

and all it contains is loved by you. Amen.

WORDS OF ASSURANCE

Hear the truth:

The Spirit of truth is alive and well in the world and in us here.

This Spirit of truth is the Spirit of love and of forgiveness.

Thanks be to God!

READINGS

- **Acts 2:1–21**

When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. ² And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. ³ Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. ⁴ All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.

⁵ Now there were devout Jews from every people under heaven living in Jerusalem. ⁶ And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each. ⁷ Amazed and astonished, they asked, "Are not all these who are speaking Galileans?" ⁸ And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language? ⁹ Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of

Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, ¹⁰ Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, ¹¹ Cretans and Arabs—in our own languages we hear them speaking about God’s deeds of power.” ¹² All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, “What does this mean?” ¹³ But others sneered and said, “They are filled with new wine.” ¹⁴ But Peter, standing with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed them, “Fellow Jews and all who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and listen to what I say. ¹⁵ Indeed, these are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only nine o’clock in the morning. ¹⁶ No, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel:

¹⁷ ‘In the last days it will be, God declares,
that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh,
and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,
and your young men shall see visions,
and your old men shall dream dreams.

¹⁸ Even upon my slaves, both men and women,
in those days I will pour out my Spirit,
and they shall prophesy.

¹⁹ And I will show portents in the heaven above
and signs on the earth below,
blood, and fire, and smoky mist.

²⁰ The sun shall be turned to darkness
and the moon to blood,
before the coming of the Lord’s great and glorious day.

²¹ Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.’

• **John 15:26–27; 16:4b–15**

²⁶ “When the Advocate comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who comes from the Father, he will testify on my behalf. ²⁷ You also are to testify, because you have been with me from the beginning.

⁴ But I have said these things to you so that when their hour comes you may remember that I told you about them. “I did not say these things to you from the beginning, because I was with you. ⁵ But now I am going to him who sent me, yet none of you asks me, ‘Where are you going?’ ⁶ But because I have said these things to you, sorrow has filled your hearts. ⁷ Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Advocate will not come to you, but if I go, I will send him to you. ⁸ And when he comes, he will prove the world wrong

about sin and righteousness and judgment: ⁹ about sin, because they do not believe in me; ¹⁰ about righteousness, because I am going to the Father, and you will see me no longer; ¹¹ about judgment, because the ruler of this world has been condemned.

¹²“I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. ¹³ When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own but will speak whatever he hears, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. ¹⁴ He will glorify me because he will take what is mine and declare it to you. ¹⁵ All that the Father has is mine. For this reason I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you.

HYMN 407 Breath on me, breath of God

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r8mCs-QHELw>

SERMON

The difficulty with this event on the Christian calendar is that there have been many divisive debates in the past about how we see the Holy Spirit. This has often culminated in heated discussion about ‘speaking in tongues.’ It then splits off into who has the gift of speaking in tongues and who just babbles.

The original event was a celebration of bringing people from all corners of the known world together and sharing God’s message in their native language. Over time this has now become a major point of conflict between those who practice this gift and those who see it as a distraction to true worship. I am not even going to try and resolve that age-old debate today.

For me the central message is about God communicating with each of us regardless of what language we speak. This should extend to our being able to genuinely communicate with people who might have very different traditions and languages to what we have in Australia today.

It is clear to me that the primary miracle of that day was the ability of the Holy Spirit to speak through those who followed Jesus in such a way that everyone present understood what Peter was saying. All barriers were broken down and God’s message was shared openly by a few people who had recently been locked away in an upper room afraid of what might

happen to them if they shared the message of resurrection love. Everyone present was included in this spectacular event.

I am not worried about the debate as to whether the miracle occurred in the voice of the speaker or the ear drums of the recipients.

In the Gospel reading today John relates how Jesus spoke of the Advocate coming to testify on His behalf. [The word Advocate can also be translated from the original Greek as counsellor, helper or comforter.] Jesus says that this Advocate, or Spirit of Truth, would testify on His behalf. So we have an agent, given to us by Jesus on behalf of God, who will get the truth across and we need to respond to Holy Spirit.

In life there are so many barriers to genuine communication which only serve to ferment our differing views on the meaning of life and building community. Jesus used the metaphor of blindness to relate to our inability to dealing with genuine communication in areas of dispute.

A few weeks ago we heard Jesus say that if we were blind then we might have an excuse but as we claim to be able to see we are condemned. Jesus had a constant battle to try and get His message across to His disciples as they constantly were unable to comprehend, or chose to misinterpret, His words.

Communicating the deeper issues of faith can be fraught. Even Jesus, with His powerful use of things like parables, seemed to be caught in a different universe to His disciples at times.

How often have you felt the frustration of coming up against someone who seems unable to comprehend the point that you are trying to make? Even when you try different ways to explain yourself you are still met with a brick wall! Or it might be, when you are trying to help someone who has a very negative view of themselves, that no matter what you say you are concerned that they will take it as an insult. This means that you have to carefully consider what you are going to say even before you start any new discussion with them.

If you were to walk down any of the streets in central Newcastle on a Saturday night you would be confronted with how hard it can be to get a message about God's love across. The pokie palaces would be doing a

roaring trade, and everywhere there would be people consumed with the latest images of fashion, drugs and drunken celebrations.

In these situations hope lives in the latest spinning reels on a pokie machine, community rests only with a few drinking mates and love is for sale at the right price. Try and start a conversation here about prayer, forgiveness or living a simple life and you would soon see that communication is not a simple thing.

A few years ago there were a series of books around the theme that men are from Mars and women are from Venus. Men and women can speak a very different language sometimes. While one party might be sharing in deep emotion the other sees this as a passing fad or nonsense.

Psychologists tell us that all too often we can listen to someone else through our self-regulating filter. This filter comes from past experiences and the desire to ignore anything which threatens our comfort zone. No matter what some people say the listener still only hears what they want to believe.

Most of us can be good at filtering out information that we don't want to hear, especially when it threatens our nice little comfort zone and requires us to change. It can be very hard for us to stop defending ourselves and take on new ideas.

Pride can make us stick to outdated and useless approaches to life even when it leaves us in an uncomfortable situation. We might be unable to make changes which leave others feeling uncomfortable. Perhaps we might be so set in our ways that we won't trust someone outside of ourselves to suggest something which might improve our life.

We can try and block our ears to what God is saying to us and refuse to allow the Holy Spirit to bring God's word alive in our hearts, especially where it might challenge our pre-conceived approach to life. I am sure that at times we all have inoculated ourselves to avoid the messages that Jesus left for us. It might be true that nothing short of a spectacular intervention of the Holy Spirit could even start to shift our stubborn thoughts.

The ability to accept change can be hard when we seek it our lives. The truth is that it can be just as hard to create change in the church as it is on

the streets of Newcastle party central. Each week we hear stories that Jesus left with us. We can be so used to hearing them that we are prevented from re-examining our faith. Since we were children most of us have heard those passages of scripture so often that we think that we know all about it and God couldn't possibly have a new message for us today.

Jesus was crucified for me. So what is new?

Jesus said give up all that you have and follow me. I think that I have heard that so many times!

We think that we have heard these passages so often that we let it slip by us yet again. Yet how many times have startling truths also wafted away in our dream state?

Why is the message from the Holy Spirit no longer penetrating our spiritual life?

Do we need flames of fire to descent on each of us to make us sit up and look again at the messages that the Holy Spirit is constantly challenging us with.

Should the Holy Spirit come howling through our lives blasting away the cobwebs that are growing through our complacency?

When God's message finally gets through to us from the Holy Spirit are our ears open to hear the message in our own language?

If you're feeling right now that you know what I am getting at and you really want to allow God's word in to do its work in your heart and mind, but you just don't know how to get the barriers down, then pray.

It's actually not your job to get the barriers down. Your part is just to give permission for the Holy Spirit to be active in your life and get out of the way while God does it. It is in prayer that you will find yourself able to give permission.

Pray. Ask God to do it.

Plead with God to break you open and to strip off all the resistance which you have built up over the years. That resistance blocks our ears and clogs our soul. Be assured that God is waiting for us to open up. God will break through maybe not immediately, maybe not in one spectacular moment, but God will become your guide if you really want it and keep asking for it.

HYMN 658 I the Lord of sea and sky

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2zr9SMm1gll>

PRAYERS FOR THE OFFERING

Your life and all you have is a gift from the great giver. Rejoice and be glad, for you are treasured. Live your life generously.

God, we thank you for the privilege of sharing in the great cycle of giving.

You give to us, others give to us,
we give in turn, and we receive again.

The world is blessed.

What we give here, we pray, will join this great circle and bring hope and life.

Amen.

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

For the past 20 years, Dungog Uniting Church has operated without an Ordained Minister in placement. It has been able to continue its ministry during this time with Lay Leadership, and together with the assistance provided by Retired Ministers and Lay Preachers from the Hunter Presbytery, along with retired Ministers living in the area, has been able to conduct a weekly service of worship. There is a Sunday School which, though small in number, is a welcome inclusion in our worship. We are a loving community of people who care for and support one another, as well as endeavour to extend that care into the local community.

Prayer: We pray for the Dungog Uniting Church; for its leaders as they endeavour to meet the challenges that are before them in continuing to provide a place of worship, along with a welcoming environment in which to engage with the local community. **Amen.**

God, we read in the book of Acts of people who heard the Good News in their own language.

We have never heard of many who are mentioned.
Some have disappeared into history.
Today, there are language groups about whom we know little or nothing;
tribes and clans who do not rate a mention on the evening news.
Across the globe, there are people and cultures struggling to survive
against the onslaught of the dominant culture,
there are languages, and hence particular ways of understanding the world,
that have been lost or are under threat,
there are habitats, homes for centuries, that are threatened with economic
destruction or the perils of climate change.
Everywhere, the loud, the large and the rich dominate the quiet, the small
and the poor.
God, we know this is not your way.
On the first day of the Church,
your message was for everyone everywhere.
No group was too small or too obscure.
We pray that the Church remembers its call to all the world.
We pray that governments remember their duty to all their citizens.
We pray for a world where all cultures, all ways of expressing life,
all dreams are cherished.
We pray for those around us who are not well.
We pray for people caught up in domestic violence, wars and famines.

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 675 Lord, the light of you love is shining
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=op17raOTXbk>

BENEDICTION

The Good News of life is entrusted to all who experience the touch of God through the Spirit.

We are challenged with a myriad ways of expressing and exploring this glorious mystery of God with us.

This is our life.

This is our call.

Go now, deep into your hearts,

your world,

and the mysteries of God.

God goes with you,

Father, Son,

and Holy Spirit.

Now and always.

Amen.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=liH_HdkWs74