

# Sunday service



from the United Reformed Church

Sunday 24th May 2026

Pentecost

The Revd Jessica  
Ashcroft-Townsley



Kossowski, Adam. Veni Sancti Spiritus, from Art in the Christian Tradition, a project of the Vanderbilt Divinity Library, Nashville, TN.  
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<https://www.flickr.com/photos/paullew/8750321716> - Fr Lawrence Lew, O.P..

## Opening Music

*Come Holy Ghost Our Souls Inspire*

Rabanus Maurus; Translator: John Cosin (1627)

Sung by the choir of Croydon Minister

## Introduction

Grace and peace from our Lord Jesus Christ and welcome to worship on this Pentecost Sunday. I am the Revd Jessica Ashcroft-Townsley, minister to Kingsteignton URC and companion minister to the Somerset Group of churches of the South Western Synod of the United Reformed Church. I am delighted to be with you all this morning as we gather to worship God and journey together in our life of faith, knowing that no matter who we

are or where we are on life's journey, the church is the one place we should all be welcome. Let us prepare our hearts and minds for worship.

## Call to Worship

We gather with open hearts, and God meets us in the waiting.

**The Spirit of God is among us.**

A breath that stirs, a flame that warms,  
a voice that calls us together.

**The Spirit of God is within us.**

Poured out on all people:  
on the hopeful and the weary,  
the young and the old,  
the ones who speak and the ones who listen.

**We are the Body of Christ.**

Come, Holy Spirit, make us one.  
Set us alight with love.

**Come, Holy Spirit, Come!**

## Hymn *Come Down O Love Divine*

Bianco da Siena (died 1434) translated Richard Frederick Littledale (1833-1890) Public Domain  
Performed by musicians and choir at First Lutheran Church, Duluth, USA

Come down, O Love divine,  
seek thou this soul of mine,  
and visit it with  
thine own ardour glowing;  
O comforter, draw near,  
within my heart appear,  
and kindle it,  
thy holy flame bestowing.

2 O let it freely burn,  
'till earthly passions turn  
to dust and ashes,  
in its heat consuming;  
and let thy glorious light  
shine ever on my sight,  
and clothe me round,  
the while my path illuming.

3 And so the yearning strong, with which the soul will long,  
shall far outpass the power of human telling;  
for none can guess its grace, till Love creates a place  
wherein the Holy Spirit makes a dwelling.

## Prayer of Confession and Transformation

Spirit of the Living God,  
on this day, especially, we celebrate you.  
You moved over the waters at creation,  
you stirred among the elders in the wilderness,  
you danced like flame upon the gathered church.

We thank you for your nearness.  
You are breath and fire, movement and life.

We praise you for your abundance,  
which is poured out on us all, and given without reserve.

And yet, we confess that we do not always live  
as people shaped by your Spirit.  
We resist your movement when it unsettles us.  
We silence the voices that make us uncomfortable.  
We cling to what feels familiar and call it faith.

At times we have forgotten that your Spirit rests on *all flesh*.  
Not only on those we expect, r on those we respect.

Forgive us, O God.  
Breathe into us again.  
Where we are tired, renew us.  
Where we are divided, draw us together.

Spirit of the Living God, fall afresh on us now,  
that we may live as one body:  
shaped by grace, sent in hope,  
and alive with your transforming power. Amen.

## **Assurance of New Life**

Friends, hear the good news: God's grace is bigger than our fears, stronger than our resistance, and deeper than our regrets.

In Jesus Christ, we are forgiven. By the Holy Spirit, we are made new.

**Thanks be to God. Amen.**

## **Prayer for Illumination**

Spirit of the living God,

as you have woven us together, now open us to your Word.

Help us to listen: with ears, hearts, minds and with our whole lives.

Make us one body, ready to hear and be changed. Amen.

## **Reading** *Numbers 11:24-30*

So Moses went out and told the people the words of the Lord; and he gathered seventy elders of the people, and placed them all around the tent. Then the Lord came down in the cloud and spoke to him, and took some of the spirit that was on him and put it on the seventy elders; and when the spirit rested upon them, they prophesied. But they did not do so again. Two men remained in the camp, one named Eldad, and the other named Medad, and the spirit rested on them; they were among those registered, but they had not gone out to the tent, and so they prophesied in the camp. And a young man ran and told Moses, 'Eldad and Medad are prophesying in the camp.' And Joshua son of Nun, the assistant of Moses, one of his chosen men, said, 'My lord Moses, stop them!' But Moses said to him, 'Are you jealous for my sake? Would that all the Lord's people were prophets, and that the Lord would put his spirit on them!' And Moses and the elders of Israel returned to the camp.

## Hymn **Spirit of God, Unseen as the Wind**

Margaret V Old (born 1932) © 1971 Scripture Union OneLicence No. # A-734713 Frodsham Methodist Church Cloud Choir. Accompanied by Andrew Ellams and produced by Andrew Emison and used with their kind permission.

*Spirit of God, unseen as the wind,  
gentle as is the dove,  
teach us the truth and help us believe,  
show us the Saviour's love.*

You spoke to us,  
long, long ago,  
gave us the written Word;  
we read it still,  
needing its truth  
through it God's voice is heard.

2 Without your help,  
we fail our Lord,  
we cannot live His way,  
we need Your power,  
we need Your strength,  
following Christ each day.

### **Reading** Acts 2:1-21

When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. 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. Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability. Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each. Amazed and astonished, they asked, 'Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language? Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabs—in our own languages we hear them speaking about God's deeds of power.' All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, 'What does this mean?' But others sneered and said, 'They are filled with new wine.'

But Peter, standing with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed them: ‘Men of Judea and all who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and listen to what I say. Indeed, these are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only nine o’clock in the morning. No, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel: “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. Even upon my slaves, both men and women, in those days I will pour out my Spirit; and they shall prophesy. And I will show portents in the heaven above and signs on the earth below, blood, and fire, and smoky mist. The sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood, before the coming of the Lord’s great and glorious day. Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.”

### **Sermon** *Woven by the Spirit*

There have been moments in my life when I’ve been convinced that if I didn’t hold things together, everything would all fall apart. I’m sure all of us have been there at some point or other. Or maybe we’re there right now. You know the moments: when responsibility felt heavy, when asking for help felt like failure, or when faith quietly slipped into the belief that you had to manage on your own.

As I look back, at those moments, I can see now that I was never as alone as I thought I was. Each time, support came. Sometimes from expected places, but often not. That support may take many forms: it might be through people who checked in, people who stepped up, those who stayed close, or even those who quietly shared the weight of a burden.

In my experience of life’s trials, I haven’t always noticed the support in the moment. Often, the evidence of God’s arms around me are only evident in hindsight. Only then, can I see the threads or connections that held me when I was too tired to hold myself.

In all these experiences, I’ve come to believe this: that experience is not

just personal. It is deeply Pentecostal.

Pentecost is often remembered for its drama: the rush of wind, the flicker of flames, the sound of many voices speaking at once in seemingly wild and unknown languages. But before any of that happens, there is something quieter and just as important happening: *the people are together*.

They are not scattered visionaries or spiritual heroes. They are far from the pious perfect or immaculate religionists. They are, above almost anything else, a gathered community of ordinary people. They are held together in uncertainty. They wait, they wonder. They don't know what comes next.

Pentecost is not a story about what happens to one extraordinary person. It is a story about what happens when God's Spirit moves among gathered people. And that matters, because many of us have been taught—subtly or explicitly—to think of faith as something private, individual, or self-contained. But we weren't created in isolation, we were rooted in community from the very beginning. Pentecost gently but clearly tells that story.

In our reading from Numbers, we open to a leader, Moses, who is exhausted from the burdens associated with his role. Leadership of the Israelites through the wilderness and to the Promised Land had become too heavy to carry alone.

God's response was not to remove Moses, but to share the Spirit that rested on him with others. And not just on a few; God tells Moses to gather seventy elders at the Tent of Meeting and in that space, the Spirit came to rest on them. This happened just as Moses expected it to. It is just as God planned.

Not long after that, however, the plan breaks open!

Two men, Eldad and Medad, were still in the camp with the rest of the people. We don't know why they missed the meeting. Maybe they were just a superfluous few. Whatever the reason, they are not in the right place. And if not in the right place, we'd think they'd be left out. Except they aren't. The Spirit rests on them, too, and they (like the other 70) begin to prophesy.

Joshua, outraged, wants to stop it. He senses disorder, a loss of control. But Moses responds with breathtaking generosity: *"Would that all the Lord's people were prophets."*

Moses understands that the Spirit is not a limited resource. God's power is not weakened by sharing. Holiness does not belong to one tent, one leader, or one structure. The Spirit goes where the Spirit wills. Moses, and Joshua, and all the people in the wilderness begin to see ever more clearly: you cannot control God. This lifting of the burden and sharing of the Spirit is a one-time event for Moses, however. The elders do not retain this power.

But, fortunately for us, what Moses longs for in the wilderness, Pentecost brings into being.

In Acts, the Spirit comes not to one chosen figure, but to many. Fire rests on each person. Voices rise in many languages. It is chaos!

But it is not chaos for its own sake. It is holy chaos and it has a purpose. Because into what seems like chaos, we find communication, connection, and good news made audible across lines of difference.

If we imagine the scene in Acts as the fire, wind, and voices enter the room: Lookers on are bewildered. While some see this as exciting, hearing the good news in their own languages, others mock and dismiss what they do not understand. Those touched by the Spirit are mocked by some as being drunk on new wine. I always chuckle when Peter raises his voice among them with a gentle correction: "They're not drunk, friends, it's only nine

o'clock in the morning!"

As we read on, we hear Peter interpreting this Day of Pentecost in light of the scriptures (specifically through the prophet Joel). Peter speaks the peace of Christ and love of God into the chaos—connecting it to tradition and making it clear that this event is part of what God promised. The Spirit of God is poured upon all flesh.

This is the birth of Church and its shared life together. The gathered people become a united community of Spirit and witness who are called to live visibly as the Body of Christ in the world. Many voices woven together in one Spirit. Moses's hoped for sharing of burdens becomes the heartbeat of the church.

The Spirit does not simply empower individuals. The Spirit forms a body. Like threads in a tapestry, each life matters because each life is connected to every other.

When one strand moves, the whole fabric shifts. When one voice speaks, others are affected. When one person struggles, the shape changes. Pentecost challenges the myth of solitary faith. It invites us to trust that God is at work not only *in us*, but *between us* and among us. Faith, like life, was never meant to be carried alone.

And what's miraculous is that the work of Pentecost is not finished. The Spirit is still being poured out on people today. It is still surprising us and speaking from unexpected places.

Whenever I study a text, I like to think about what question I'm meant to wrestle with. The question Pentecost asks of us is not: *Do we understand the Spirit?* It asks if we are willing to be woven together, open to voices we did not expect, ready to trust that God's Spirit is already at work among us.

The good news of Pentecost is this: We belong to one another, held

together by the Spirit of the living God. Wherever that Spirit leads us next, let us be willing to go not as isolated threads, but as a people woven together in love. Amen.

**Hymn**     *Praise The Spirit In Creation*

David Hurd (born 1950) © GIA Publications Inc., OneLicence No. A-734713 Sung by the shoir of St Barnabas Episcopal Church

Praise the Spirit in creation,  
breath of God, life's origin:  
Spirit, moving on the waters,  
forming order deep within,  
source of breath  
for all things breathing,  
life in whom all lives begin.

4 Tell of how the ascended Jesus  
armed a people for his own;  
how a hundred men and women  
turned the known world  
upside down,  
to its dark and furthest corners  
by the wind of heaven blown.

2 Praise the Spirit, close companion  
of our inmost thoughts and ways;  
who, in showing us God's wonders,  
moves our hearts to love and praise;  
and God's will, to those who listen,  
by a still small voice conveys.

5 Praise we then, O Lord the Spirit,  
on our lives descend in might;  
let your flame burn bright within us,  
fire our hearts and clear our sight,  
till, white hot, in your possession  
we too set the world alight.

3 Praise the Spirit, who enlightened  
priests and prophets with the word;  
hidden truth behind the wisdoms  
which as yet know not their Lord;  
by whose love and power in Jesus  
God himself  
was seen and heard.

6: Praise, O Praise the Holy Spirit,  
praise the Father, praise the Word,  
Source and Truth and Inspiration,  
Trinity in deep accord;  
Through Your voice  
which speaks within us  
we your creatures call you Lord.

**Affirmation of Faith**

**I believe in God, the Father almighty,  
creator of heaven and earth.**

**I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord,  
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,  
born of the Virgin Mary,  
suffered under Pontius Pilate,  
was crucified, died, and was buried;  
he descended to the dead.  
On the third day he rose again;  
he ascended into heaven,  
he is seated at the right hand of the Father,  
and he will come to judge the living and the dead.**

**I believe in the Holy Spirit,  
the holy catholic Church,  
the communion of saints,  
the forgiveness of sins,  
the resurrection of the body,  
and the life everlasting. Amen.**

### **Prayers of Intercession**

Let us bring our prayers before God, who hears us with love and responds with grace.

Spirit of the living God,  
you are poured out on all flesh.  
You bind us together in one body,  
and you hear the prayers we carry.

Spirit of God, **hear our prayer.**

We pray for the Church in all its diversity:  
for congregations filled with joy and excitement,  
and for those tired or uncertain.  
Where voices have been silenced,  
breathe courage.

Where communities are divided,  
weave understanding and trust.

Spirit of God, **hear our prayer.**

We pray for the world you love:  
for places of conflict and fear,  
communities caught in violence or injustice,  
and leaders entrusted with power and responsibility.  
Pour out your Spirit of wisdom, restraint, and peace.

Spirit of God, **hear our prayer.**

We pray for all who feel overwhelmed or worn down:  
those carrying heavy burdens,  
grieving loss,  
or struggling with illness, anxiety, or isolation.  
Where hope feels thin,  
be breath and comfort.

Spirit of God, **hear our prayer.**

We pray for those whose voices are often overlooked:  
the young and the old,  
the unheard and the unexpected,  
those on the edges of accepted community.  
Help us recognise your Spirit speaking through them  
and learn to listen with humility and care.

Spirit of God, **hear our prayer.**

We pray for ourselves:  
for openness to your movement,  
for courage to follow where you lead,  
and for trust in one another as we share your work.

Make us faithful threads woven into the fabric of your love.

Spirit of God, **hear our prayer.**

Into your keeping, O God,  
we place all for whom we pray,  
trusting your Spirit to hold, to heal, and to renew.  
In the name of Jesus Christ.  
Amen.

We draw our prayers together in the words Jesus taught us saying Our Father...

### **Offertory Prayer**

Spirit of the living God,  
You have given so much to us all.  
As we offer our gifts today,  
we give not as isolated individuals,  
but as one body, sharing in your work of renewal.

Receive all that we bring:  
our money, time, energy,  
and our willingness to be transformed by you.

Use these gifts to strengthen your church  
and serve your world. Amen.

## **Hymn**     *She Sits Like A Bird*

John L Bell (born 1949) and Graham Maule (1958-2019)

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She sits like a bird,  
brooding on the waters,  
hovering on the chaos  
of the world's first day;  
she sighs and she sings,  
mothering creation,  
waiting to give birth  
to all the Word will say.

2 She wings over earth,  
resting where she wishes,  
lighting close at hand  
or soaring through the skies;  
she nests in the womb,  
welcoming each wonder,  
nourishing potential  
hidden to our eyes.

3 She dances in fire,  
startling her spectators,  
waking tongues of ecstasy  
where dumbness reigned;  
She weans and inspires  
all whose hearts are open,  
nor can she be captured,  
silenced or restrained.

4 For she is the Spirit,  
one with God in essence,  
gifted by the Saviour  
in eternal love;  
and she is the key  
opening the scriptures,  
enemy of apathy  
and heavenly dove.

## **Blessing**

May the Spirit of God rest upon and within you.

May you be woven together in love,  
and strengthened for the journey ahead.

Now go in the peace of Christ,  
motivated by the love of God,  
and empowered by the breath of the Spirit. Amen.

## **Closing Music**     *Come Holy Spirit*

Tom Booth and Robert Feduccia OneLicence No. # A-734713  
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## **Sources**

Affirmation of Faith – The Apostles' Creed. All other material by Jessica Ashcroft-Townsley.

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