

We fear to say what we think, perhaps we fear to confess our faith to the world and our doubts to each other.

Maybe we are afraid to appear eccentric in our secular society or disloyal to the party line of our Church...

Maybe we fear to lose our cosy identity, and let the Holy Spirit push us out of our nest.

But for freedom Christ has set us free. (Timothy Radcliffe-Why go to Church? 2008)

Send us out in the power of your Spirit to live and work to your praise and glory. Amen.

HYMN MEDITATION FOR PENTECOST Malcolm Sturgess

There are so many beautiful Whitsun hymns, I wish Whitsun could go on for a month before we embark on Trinity. In a sense it does go on, for ever, and maybe we could find excuses for singing some of these little gems at other times.

It is difficult to choose just one, so let's go for the oldest, *Veni sancte Spiritus, or The Golden Sequence*. This dates from the 13th century, and is attributed to either Pope Innocent III or, more likely, Archbishop Stephen Langton of Canterbury. "It is commonly regarded as one of the greatest masterpieces of sacred Latin poetry ever written". There are several English translations; it is interesting to trawl through the Internet and compare them. The two best-known ones appear in 77 current hymn books, roughly 3:1 those by Edward Caswall and J.M.Neale.

Caswall is of local interest, as he was Perpetual Curate at Stratford-sub-Castle, and his translation is in our red A & MNS. Neale was a very different person, a poet who won eleven poetry prizes while still at Trinity, Cambridge. "Low Church" and "High Church" respectively. Neither translation is ideal. I think of Caswall as the weekday version and Neale as Sunday Best. Caswall as plodding through muddy fields at S-S-C and Neale as wafting through the rarified atmosphere of Sackville College. Does the Holy Spirit plod or waft? We have to make a decision, and my vote goes unhesitatingly to Neale. So we print Neale's version below, and you can compare it with your own red hymn book. Paraclete means Advocate, as in John XIV, 26.

The Golden Sequence: there is a lot about this on the Internet. It is the title of a modern book, but if you scroll down past references to that you will read that a sequence is a hymn sung before the Gospel (rather like our GRADUAL, which mean on the steps of the Sanctuary), and *Veni Sancte Spiritus* is the sequence for Pentecost and the eight following days.

There is no argument about the tune. It's either plainsong or a beautiful, gentle diatonic tune by Samuel Webbe (1740 - 1816). Both wonderful. Webbe's tune should be sung quietly and gently, but precisely. There is nothing sloppy about the Holy Spirit. These really are the most exquisite, compassionate words; it is a pleasure to type them and relish them.

Pentecost Sunday

Numbers 11 v 24-30 Acts 2 v 1-21 John 20 v 19-23



Come, thou holy Paraclete, And from thy celestial seat
Send thy light and brilliancy;
Father of the poor draw near; Giver of all gifts, be near;
Come, the soul's true radiancy.

Come, of comforters the best, Of the soul the sweetest guest,
Come in toil refreshingly:
Thou in labour rest most sweet, Thou art shadow from the heat,
Comfort in adversity.

O thou Light, most pure and blest, Shine within the inmost breast
Of thy faithful company.
Where thou art not, man hath nought; Every holy deed and thought
Come from thy Divinity.

What is soilèd, make thou pure; What is wounded, work its cure;
What is parchèd, fructify;
What is rigid, gently bend; What is frozen, warmly tend;
Straighten what goes erringly.

Fill thy faithful, who confide, In thy power to guard and guide,
With thy sevenfold Mystery.
Here thy grace and virtue send: Grant salvation in the end,
And in heaven, felicity.

When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you."

After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord.

Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you."

When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."

A reflection from Revd Becky

Today we celebrate the gift of the Holy Spirit to the early church followers and we celebrate the gift of the Holy Spirit for us all today.

In our reading from John's gospel we do not know where the disciples were gathered (The Greek language just means that they were inside and not a specific location). But Jesus comes and stands wherever they were- in the middle of them- even though the doors are shut.

The lack of location is deliberate in John's storytelling because it reinforces the reader's understanding that Jesus is *the door*. The disciples were enclosed in *the fold* described in John 10. Jesus opens up the way and cares for the 'sheep'.

The story is one of intimacy where Jesus appears to his 'own' and breathes on his 'own'. The story is one of intimacy because it shows the close relationship between the disciples and Jesus- they hear Jesus voice and know him as their shepherd.

What does his voice say? PEACE.

What does his voice say? AS THE FATHER SENDS ME I SEND YOU

In the midst of fear and uncertainty Jesus brings comfort and peace not only with words of reassurance but with the ongoing presence of

the Holy Spirit in the lives of the disciples- '*an ongoing incarnation of the Word*'. (Karoline Lewis)

Jesus enables his disciples- he enables the unbelief to turn to belief... he enables the fear to turn to peace and enables them to leave the fold and go out... He enables the disciples to proclaim forgiveness ... because his relationship with them is just as his relationship was (and is) with God the Father.

The Spirit appears on Jesus behalf as a helper, a comforter and advocate and intercessor. So that Jesus is an abiding presence with his disciples forever.

The arrival of the Holy Spirit in the book of Acts chapter 2 is a contrast to John's description. It is violent, overpowering, confusing, and disturbing. For Luke, Jesus ministry begins with the Holy Spirit descending, the Spirit continues through him changing the world to bring disturbance- good news to the poor, setting the captives free, bringing sight to the blind, showing forgiveness of sins. Jesus ministry on earth 'ends' with the sending of the Holy Spirit. Jesus' same work is able to continue.

Both Peter and Paul speak of the transforming work of the Spirit in raising Jesus to life. Their own beliefs and lives are disturbed. It is in fact only when the disciples are persecuted that they go on mission- scattered through Judea and Samaria. The Spirit's mission to the gentiles- to Paul and the Ethiopian eunuch brings great change to the Jewish 'church'. Being sent out meant being open to change- to be touched and changed by God in others, the God of surprises.

- I wonder as you reflect on your own experience of life whether you have found the Holy Spirit of God a comfort or a disturbance? How are both are a gift?
- How do you think the church is being sent out?
- How are you being sent out?

We are called to witness... we are free to be sent... but often Christians appear to be paralysed by fear, refusing to leave through the door which Jesus has already unlocked.