

TOGETHER

only physically apart

Elston | North Muskham | Southwell | Sutton on Trent



Happy Lockdown Birthday!

Did you know it was your birthday? If you're a disciple of Christ, part of the worldwide church then it's your birthday this week. Pentecost marks the birth of the church, when it all began.

I've seen a few lockdown birthdays over social media - in fact Katie's birthday plans were thwarted at the beginning of April. But of all the lockdown birthday's I've seen, they've all still received their gifts. Whether Royal Mail, Amazon or some other method, folk have managed to send their gifts despite being personally absent; and Pentecost is no exception.

The disciples in Acts chapter 2 are not so much locked down as locked in, or perhaps it's the world they're locking out. They're afraid of what's out there. But this is at least a hat-trick of lock down miracles for Jesus. First there's the miraculous tomb escape, then there's the locked room appearance (actually there's two) and then this. But the miracle is not so much getting into the locked-in disciples (he'd already done that previously, on more than one occasion) it was the way Jesus, by the power of the Holy Spirit busts them out! The disciples had nothing to give, no plan, no strategy, no idea what the future would hold and suddenly they're world-beaters - they preach the gospel with a confidence, competence and courage that they'd never had before, they are heard in every language present and Peter personally preaches bringing three thousand people to discipleship. Wow!

But what of this Pentecost? It's a birthday for the church but there'll be no party - not yet. My wife's plans are on hold and we will retry when the lockdown ends. We too may plan a future Easter, Pentecost... the list of missed occasions is growing (though the initial lifting of lockdown will not be sudden, nor will it be the time for large gatherings), but now we must celebrate in isolation. Be sure of one thing though: whilst we are unable to hold the party, light the candles, share the close fellowship of the celebration it *should* be - mark my words - the gift will still get through. God's Holy Spirit is not and cannot be locked down, locked in, locked out, shackled or contained in any way. God is moving, God has never stopped moving and the same blessings are for us today as were for those first disciples, two thousand years ago. The same message is true for us, "Repent, and be baptised every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you, for your children, and for all who are far away, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to him." (Acts 2:38-39) Listen carefully, for God is calling us, all of us and there's a gift to unwrap, not just for us, but for us to share. **Happy Birthday to all!**

The Holy Spirit for All!

Acts 2:1-21 (NRSV)

Inclusivity is a massive agenda these days but before it was fashionable it was already on God's mind. When I preach I hope that at least some of the congregation will understand what I'm saying - at least, unlike Peter at the first Pentecost, I can be sure that they all speak the same language that I do! For that Peter, it seems thousands got exactly what he was saying, despite many of them having a different language - how incredible is that!

There seems to be a real sense of unity in the way the Bible has been speaking lately and it's been a welcome theme at a time of isolation. Yet in this passage, there is a clear division - despite the incredible unity of the spirit.

One of the most unifying things is a collective experience, however it can also be one of the most excluding factors. Have you ever been in a conversation where folk are talking about something that you haven't experienced? (At the most trivial level perhaps you haven't seen the latest episode of a drama that everyone's talking about or missed the match and so can't really join in with the conversation.) This is something that I worry about in the period of lockdown. There are many of us that are connecting in many ways - online services, Zoom gatherings, telephone conversations; but the main common ground is missing - meeting together for our weekly act of all-together, corporate worship. As long as this is missing, we miss the main shared experience and I worry that when we reconvene, each changed in some way, we may no longer be on the same page!

We see this in the Pentecost story too. There is a miraculous unity in the movement of the spirit. One violent wind brings one fire that rests on each of them and they preach one message received apparently universally across many languages (verse 5 tells us that present are devout Jews from *every* nation under heaven - I won't list them all but many *are* listed!)

The disciples and then the crowd have the most unifying shared experience and we are told that three thousand are added to their number! But it's not universal. Look carefully at verses 7 and 13; there are clearly two responses here. There are the amazed but also the sneerers. They all see (and hear) the commotion and react with interest (actually verse 6 says that they are bewildered at first!) A crowd gathers. Then they have a choice: will they engage and wonder what power is behind this or will they dismiss it and sneer? The first group, it says, are, "amazed and perplexed." They are sceptical but most importantly they are not cynical. Scepticism is a healthy questioning of all that we see (particularly second hand) to ensure that it is of God. We should always test what people claim is



1. Circuit Services

This Sunday we are doing a combined, live Pentecost service as a circuit which will be broadcast on the circuit YouTube channel (<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCF-CBiFzWL81CUJrKjC1Psw>) with further details on the 'NewarkandSouthwellMethodist' FaceBook Page (which can be accessed without a FaceBook account - [Click Here](#)). Do join us as we celebrate the birth of the church!

2. TV Services

Pentecost Sunday Worship BBC 1

The Bishop of Hereford, the Rt Rev Richard Jackson, leads a service for Pentecost Sunday from the city's historic cathedral, with hymns recorded by Songs of Praise in 2017. The service was filmed before the closure of all church buildings was announced.

3. Radio Services

BBC Radio 4 (Also online.)

Stephen Gibson leads an Elim Pentecostal service from City Church Cardiff in which Dominic and Catherine de Souza reflect on Pentecost during lockdown.

4. Cliff #FestivalAtHome

All of the content from Cliff College's #FestivalAtHome is now available from their YouTube channel FestivalTV - you can watch back the main celebrations, bible studies and seminars. I'm not sure how long they will be available, so I'd make a bee-line for ten if you're interested!

If all this baffles you - call me or email: peter.hibberts@methodist.org.uk



of God and not simply follow blindly, but to be cynical is to question with an expectation that it won't be of God. Sometimes it comes out of jealousy, fear or a sense of exclusion. 'If I'm not part of or at the centre of this movement then I don't want it to work or be real.' I've seen this, I've felt it myself too. As the minister it's easy to feel like I should be at the centre of things and even to feel like things should start with me - but what an arrogant approach that would be! It's not just ministers that can feel that way either - we *all* can. What then follows is a dismissive approach where we tear down and undermine what God may be doing. In Acts sneerers suggest that this must simply be drunkenness. It's tragic really because what results is self-exclusion - they opt out of possibly the greatest single out-pouring of God's spirit in History!

So what can we learn from this? Well, know that God has not been idle during the time of lockdown. I've seen some wonderful things happening in my churches (new home groups forming over Zoom and new expressions of worship happening over Zoom in particular). At first I've felt a little excluded (though please hear me say that I haven't been excluded at all - just not present) but they are, I'm sure, of God and I look forward to a point when I can get involved (at the right time). You may have been in the middle of these movements, you may feel very much on the periphery or on the outside even - don't worry though - there's room for us all in what God's doing and provided we approach this 'new wine' (verse 13) with amazement and astonishment and not dismissal, then we will get the chance to be involved in what God is doing (don't worry if you're not technological, God's not doing all the new stuff online either!)

Perhaps the most important thing that we can learn from this is that whoever we are, whatever our background, culture, past experiences (Peter's original audience would have been wildly varied coming from every nation under heaven) provided we are devout (as is their common factor - see verse 5) we can all hear and be blessed by what is going on. We can all receive God's spirit if we want to. The Greek word which is translated as '*devout*' here is *eulabeis* which can also mean 'pious'. It comes from *eu* meaning well or good (as in eulogy) and *lambano* meaning to take or receive. Together it can mean taking hold well or carefully and cautiously receiving. It's the same word that is used to describe Simeon who first sees the Messiah in Jesus, as a mere baby, in Luke chapter 2. Simeon is characterised as someone who is was 'waiting for the consolation of Israel' meaning he was desperate to see God move and also expectant that he would. Interestingly enough, he is also described as having the Holy Spirit on him. This is the secret! Let's be expectant and desperate to see God move - and know then that we will, even - no especially - in these times. **Come Holy Spirit.**

Prayer Space

I would like to invite you to pray personally this week, for yourself and for the church, for the out-pouring of God's Holy Spirit upon us all. In the time of the first pentecost and also now, I believe God is filling God's church with New Wine. Pray that we may see what God is doing, approach it in a 'devout' way with amazement and astonishment before opening our hands to receive it.

You may want to open your hands and simply pray, '**Come Holy Spirit.**' Rest for a while and allow God to bless you.

A prayer for Pentecost:

Loving God, we are constantly amazed that you come to us in new and exciting ways. On this day we remember how your Spirit came and empowered ordinary people to become the Church.

We would pray like a diverse crowd gathered in Jerusalem and demoralized disciples in an upper room, **come Holy Spirit.**

Holy Spirit of God, come to us now.

Speak your peace to our hearts, send us your power, and your comfort that we may hear your call to us today and live as your people, today and always. Forgive us when we forget you are there and we struggle on in our own strength. Renew us and inspire us. In Jesus' name. **Amen.**

If you have specific prayer requests, do get in touch. If you would like requests to be shared around the SMC prayer chain contact Colin Beckett colin1244@gmail.com.

There is a specific page, dedicated to prayers written for this time on the Methodist Church website: <https://www.methodist.org.uk/about-us/coronavirus/prayers-during-the-coronavirus-pandemic/> If you are lost for words to pray, you may find these helpful.

Funerals

The Methodist Church has prepared a short act of worship for anyone who is unable to attend a funeral of a loved one. The words offered are a mix of the funeral liturgy and original materials and can be accessed by clicking this [LINK](#). Please contact Revd. Hibberts if you require a paper copy or if you would like prayer support at this time.

Hymns and songs to reflect on...

Holy Spirit We Welcome You (StF 385) [LINK](#)

Come Down O Love Divine (StF 372) [LINK](#)

Breathe On Me Breath Of God (StF 370) [LINK](#)

Into a World Of Dark (StF 387) NO LINK

O God Of Burning Cleansing Flame (StF #) [LINK](#)

Click 'LINK's to access YouTube clips of each song.

Help for the isolated

Elston residents, if you need support during the lockdown please contact the Good Neighbourhood Group through Sandra Wright on 07773 689736 or Linda Fitzgerald on 0798937115.

The Sutton-on-Trent Buddies Corona Virus Helpline is up and running - for help of any kind the number to ring is 01636 351615. or email suttonbuddy@outlook.com

Southwell Town Council can provide support by calling 07874780931, 07874780932 or 01636816103.

North Muskham's Buddy Scheme can be reached by contacting Andy Willey on 07967138724 or muskhambuddyscheme@yahoo.com.

If you would like to volunteer you should also make contact using the above details.

Can you help?

Video contributions: Could you contribute to our YouTube channel? The staff team are keen involve folk in the online church experience and would love to hear from you if you have something to say. This could be a testimony, a short homily (a thought for the day style contribution based on a Bible passage or circumstance) a prayer or a poem/reflection. If you can record something and send it to me, then I will try to include it somehow (it may be featured in Sunday worship or added to the YouTube channel as a 'stand alone' item.) For more information, do get in touch.

Giving:



Could you make a donation to the Newark FoodBank via your local collection point? Or perhaps you could make a financial donation online at: newark.foodbank.org.uk.

Or could you donate to the Christian Aid Week collection at justgiving.com/campaign/CAWeek2020.



Families:

families4SMC@gmail.com

CHILDREN'S CHURCH AT HOME!

During social distancing we are providing full children's church session for our younger church family members each week. You will be able to download the plan every week here:

<https://www.southwellmethodist.org.uk/childrenschurchathome.htm> so that you can do it at home as a family to help your children explore the theme that Rev. Peter preaches on in his service.

These activities may require some resources but they should be things you can gather up from your homes. There is also a PDF of activity sheets which children can complete during the service. All you'll need for this is a pen/pencil/colouring pens and to print off the sheets before the service starts. Enjoy!



Read the account of the first Pentecost together and explore these questions:

Talk together with children

- How would you tell this story to somebody else, in your own words?
- Have you ever been in a situation where things seemed a little confusing?
- What might be different in the world if people were more unified?

Talk together with young people

- Where would you be if you imagine yourself in this story?
- How do you think you would have responded to what was happening?
- How do you think the power of the Holy Spirit drew people together here?

Pentecost story basket



If you have younger children at home, you could explore the story of Pentecost this week by creating a Pentecost story basket for the children to play with. Include play people, battery-operated tealights, red, yellow and orange ribbons or streamers, play windmills and bubbles. Have fun!

Keep in Touch

There will be lots of opportunities to keep in touch during this time, not least by picking up the phone, to each other, or giving me a call (Rev Peter: 01636812166) or sending an email (peter.hibberts@methodist.org.uk). Can I recommend the Newark and Southwell Methodist Church FaceBook page to you in particular. It's an open page so it's available to all and you needn't be on FaceBook to view it. You can access it at facebook.com/NewarkandSouthwellMethodist/. Don't worry if you're not a member of Southwell Methodist Church, we're all in this together!

Also, spread the word to anyone you think would appreciate receiving this newsletter. Let them know of our FaceBook pages and if you come across someone who might benefit from receiving it please get in touch.