

Lord God, forgive our lack of courage when we want to hide behind our traditions and conventions; when we don't share the message of your love with all people; just the ones like us.

Forgive us for not believing your promises and for our reluctance to put our trust in you. May we each feel the power of your transforming love, changing us into your bold disciples.

Father God, thank you for your love. Lord Jesus, thank you for your gift of yourself. Holy Spirit, give new life to those for whom we pray this Pentecost. **Amen**

We ask this prayer in the name of Jesus who taught us to say:

**Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name.
Thy Kingdom come; Thy will be done - on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses,
As we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.
For Thine is the Kingdom, the power and the glory,
For ever and ever.**

Amen

Reading: Acts 2: 1-21 The Holy Spirit comes at Pentecost New International Version

¹ When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. ² Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. ³ They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. ⁴ All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.

⁵ Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven. ⁶ When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard their own language being spoken. ⁷ Utterly amazed, they asked: "Aren't all these who are speaking Galileans?" ⁸ Then how is it that each of us hears them in our native language? ⁹ Parthians, Medes and Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, ¹⁰ Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene; visitors from Rome ¹¹ (both Jews and converts to Judaism); Cretans and Arabs—we hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!" ¹² Amazed and perplexed, they asked one another, "What does this mean?"

¹³ Some, however, made fun of them and said, "They have had too much wine."

¹⁴ Then Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice and addressed the crowd: "Fellow Jews and all of you who live in Jerusalem, let me explain this to you; listen carefully to what I say. ¹⁵ These people are not drunk, as you suppose. It's only nine in the morning! ¹⁶ No, this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel:

¹⁷ "In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams.

¹⁸ Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy.

¹⁹ I will show wonders in the heavens above and signs on the earth below, blood and fire and billows of smoke.²⁰ The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and glorious day of the Lord.²¹ And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.'

Hymn: **The Days of Elijah** Robin Mark **Songs of Fellowship 1047**

1. These are the days of Elijah
Declaring the word of the Lord:
And these are the days of Your servant
Moses,
Righteousness being restored.
And though these are days of great trial,
Of famine and darkness and sword,
Still we are a voice in the desert crying
'Prepare for the way of the Lord.'

2. These are the days of Ezekiel,
The dry bones becoming as flesh;
And these are the days of Your servant
David,
Rebuilding the temple of praise.
These are the days of the harvest,
The fields are as white in the world,
And we are the labourers in the vineyard,
Declaring the word of the Lord.

**Behold He comes riding on the
clouds,
Shining like the sun at the trumpet
call;
Lift your voice, it's the year of jubilee,
Out of Zion's hill salvation comes.**

Behold He comes...

Reading: **Ezekiel 37: 1 - 14** **The valley of dry bones** New International Version

¹ The hand of the Lord was on me, and he brought me out by the Spirit of the Lord and set me in the middle of a valley; it was full of bones. ² He led me back and forth among them, and I saw a great many bones on the floor of the valley, bones that were very dry. ³ He asked me, "Son of man, can these bones live?" I said, "Sovereign Lord, you alone know."

⁴ Then he said to me, "Prophesy to these bones and say to them, 'Dry bones, hear the word of the Lord!' ⁵ This is what the Sovereign Lord says to these bones: I will make breath enter you, and you will come to life. ⁶ I will attach tendons to you and make flesh come upon you and cover you with skin; I will put breath in you, and you will come to life. Then you will know that I am the Lord."

⁷ So I prophesied as I was commanded. And as I was prophesying, there was a noise, a rattling sound, and the bones came together, bone to bone. ⁸ I looked, and tendons and flesh appeared on them and skin covered them, but there was no breath in them.

⁹ Then he said to me, "Prophesy to the breath; prophesy, son of man, and say to it, 'This is what the Sovereign Lord says: Come, breath, from the four winds and breathe into these slain, that they may live.'" ¹⁰ So I prophesied as he commanded me, and breath entered them; they came to life and stood up on their feet—a vast army.

¹¹ Then he said to me: "Son of man, these bones are the people of Israel. They say, 'Our bones are dried up and our hope is gone; we are cut off.' ¹² Therefore prophesy and say to them: 'This is what the Sovereign Lord says: My people, I am going to open your graves and bring you up from them; I will bring you back to the land of Israel. ¹³ Then you, my people, will know that I am the Lord, when I open your graves and bring you up from them. ¹⁴ I will put my Spirit in you and you will live, and I will

settle you in your own land. Then you will know that I the Lord have spoken, and I have done it, declares the Lord.”

Reflection: Dem Bones...

‘Dem bones, dem bones, dem dry bones’. ‘Dem bones, dem bones, dem...

So, what’s this song all about anyway?

We know it’s about the Old Testament Bible story we’ve just read, where Ezekiel has a vision of a valley of dry bones. He sees piles of dry bones coming to life. At my age, I could do with some of that - a few ‘dry bones’ coming to life!

Made me think though... I mean, some things do come back to life that seem, well... dead! Even in my garden!! God, and anyone else who knows me, knows I hate gardening!

But I look at all the trees which are now in bloom (hay fever sufferers beware), whereas only a couple of months back what we can see now seemed impossible.

So take Pentecost.

People who were cowering away suddenly speaking out - and in different languages at that! And look what sparked it off - a real grave-busting coming back to life!

I know this was a long while ago, but it’s still happening now and in ways we would never have imagined.

There’s always been the occasional outbreak of goodwill of course, especially at Christmas when there’s often a different sort of spirit at work... but it’s bigger than that.

Stuff like the Berlin Wall coming down, or the end of apartheid, or people coming out of the woodwork to volunteer during a pandemic...

Even bigger, perhaps - it’s good to think big. Maybe God’s Holy Spirit is building up to something really, really big! Like saving our planet and every soul upon it!

Well, why not? It’ll need more than a few green shoots though. It needs us to work at it tirelessly. With commitment. With Love

We’ll need all our rattling bones to come to life to be part of ‘Making Christ known’!

Reading: John 15: 26-27; 16: 4b-15 The Work of the Holy Spirit New International Version

²⁶ “When the Advocate comes, whom I will send to you from the Father - the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father - he will testify about me. ²⁷ And you also must testify, for you have been with me from the beginning.

^{4b} I did not tell you this from the beginning because I was with you, ⁵ but now I am going to him who sent me. None of you asks me, ‘Where are you going?’ ⁶ Rather, you are filled with grief because I have said these things. ⁷ But very truly I tell you, it is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Advocate will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you. ⁸ When he comes, he will prove the world to be in the wrong about sin and righteousness and judgment: ⁹ about sin, because people do not believe

in me; ¹⁰ about righteousness, because I am going to the Father, where you can see me no longer; ¹¹ and about judgment, because the prince of this world now stands condemned.

¹² “I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear. ¹³ But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. ¹⁴ He will glorify me because it is from me that he will receive what he will make known to you. ¹⁵ All that belongs to the Father is mine. That is why I said the Spirit will receive from me what he will make known to you.”

Message:

It's our birthday! Yes, the birthday of the Christian Church, born 2000 years ago at Pentecost! So, Happy Birthday!

Born as small babies, we ourselves develop and grow. We change as the years go by and adapt to different circumstances. So it is with the Church, or should be, shouldn't it? And we are the Church.

During the Covid-19 pandemic we've had to do things differently. During lockdowns we couldn't meet in our buildings and as things eased and we could go back inside to worship, we have still had to make changes in order to keep one another safe from the virus. For some people it was a step too far just yet and they are continuing to worship from the safety of their own homes, making use of technology or using printed material to help them feel close to God and others, as they worship, praise and pray.

However, essentially we still have the same job to do, wherever we are and in whatever circumstances. As Christians, we do not only worship God, we've been given work to do. Before Jesus ascended into heaven he commissioned the disciples to make disciples of all nations, baptising them and teaching them to obey everything He had commanded them.

Then, through the gift of the Holy Spirit, Jesus was able to be with those first disciples and now with us, anywhere and at any time, for always.

And so our task is: **'To know Christ and make him known.'**

I'm hoping that some of you will be thinking, 'I've heard those words before!'

You see, I've borrowed them from the World Federation of Methodist and Uniting Church Women. It's their strap line. Methodist Women in Britain comes under that umbrella. I feel it expresses just what Jesus wanted of the original disciples and what he wants from us today.

He wants us to **Make Him Known!** Well, more than **wants** us to. It's an **instruction** - do it! **'Therefore go and make disciples of all nations.'** (Matthew 28:19) In our gospel reading from John we heard Jesus' words again, **'And you also must testify.'** Yes, words to the twelve, but we, as Jesus' followers today, are included in his teaching; his instructions.

Through being in a close relationship with Jesus we can say we really know him and can testify to what he means to us and say what he has done for us. Bringing it down to a very mundane level, if you're recommending a product to someone, if you can say

how it worked for you, your words will have more conviction! "Yes, this powder really removed all the stains from my shirt. You should try it!"

Through reading the Bible I can find Jesus' words of comfort and guidance. Through Christian friends I can hear words of encouragement. But through prayer, all different kinds of prayer, I know, through the power of the Holy Spirit, that Jesus loves me and is right here, beside me.

During my journey with Jesus, not everything has turned out how I may have wanted, but he has helped me to cope with some difficult circumstances. And, I know that through his death on the cross, he's removed the stains I could only show to him. **I know that my Redeemer lives!** So I must do as the second part of that strap line says and help to **'Make Christ known'**!

Tomorrow, 24th May, is the day that we Methodists remember that John Wesley felt his heart 'strangely warmed', when he attended a meeting at a house in Aldersgate Street. He had been yearning, seeking a close relationship with Jesus. From here on, his way of making Jesus Christ known went from strength to strength. He travelled the length and breadth of the country on horseback. He found new, different ways, of getting the message across to many who had been ignored or excluded from the message of God's love.

And so, as I said, during the covid restrictions we've had to find ways of worship and being and doing church differently. We haven't been able to be inside our church buildings. At Lumley there is 'Church on the Street' on Sunday mornings and delivery of meals and food parcels. On Good Friday we witnessed by meeting to worship outside, at Seaham. This afternoon we're meeting there again, celebrating the coming of the Holy Spirit.

By using technology with services like this one, and by Zoom for worship, or Bible study and gatherings during Lent and by circulating printed materials, it's been possible for people to be together: just differently, in ways we never imagined. But now, as many go back to our church buildings, are we going to stay inside them and not change at all? Or are we going to find different ways of reaching those who don't know Jesus; who don't know his love for them?

I don't know how. But I do know that by prayer and by being open to the guiding of the Holy Spirit, we can explore and then discover what God wants us to do. Does he want us to do things differently? Is a wind of change blowing through us; the breath of God; the Holy Spirit? How does he want us to make his love known in our communities?

Those disciples were a timid bunch until the power of the Spirit came and they became bold. They dared to speak out. They did amazing things and through that same power, followers of Jesus have continued to do this for 2000 years. We cannot do God's work in our own strength, but through the gift of the Holy Spirit, we can.

St. Paul's words in his letter to the Ephesians (3:20) tells us: **'... to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us'**. (N.I.V.) And again Paul writes encouraging words to his young friend, Timothy. **For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love, and self discipline.'** (2 Timothy 1:7)

I know our first reaction is always to think what we can't do, or what we think we're not good at. Each one of us has been given gifts. They aren't the same. How would that be

any use if we were only all good at the one thing? We are all different. God made us like that and he can and does use anyone. We each have different skills and talents.

We're a very mixed bunch and through the Spirit's power, between us, I'm sure we're able to accomplish all sorts of things. But sometimes we don't recognise our own gifts. We need to encourage one another, pray together and be open to God's Spirit, at work in us, trusting in Jesus' promises.

It's no use telling God we're too old or too young. He's never done with us. There's always something that you and I can do among our families, friends, and communities, as well as in our churches.

Let's pray that God will use us to help to make his love known. Then through the power of the Holy Spirit, we can **Make Christ Known right here and now** - in our communities, our neighbourhoods, our families.

Watch out! It will be exciting stuff!!

Hymn: **Consuming Fire** Tim Hughes

Songs of Fellowship 1547

1. There must be more than this:
O Breath of God, come breathe within.
There must be more than this:
Spirit of God, we wait for You.
Fill us anew, we pray;
Fill us anew, we pray

2. Come like a rushing wind,
Clothe us with power from on high,
Now set the captives free;
Leave us abandoned to Your praise.
Lord, let Your glory fall;
Lord, let Your glory fall

**Consuming fire, fan into flame
A passion for Your name.
Spirit of God, fall in this place.
Lord, have Your way,
Lord have Your way with us.**

Consuming fire...

Prayers of Intercession:

Now in this silence let us come before God and offer ourselves to Him through prayer.

Lord God, we bring before You our prayers for this troubled world. So many problems caused by the selfish interests of mankind.

We think of all the wars being fought around the globe right now in over thirty countries, in the Middle East, North-West Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa. Some have been going on for generations like the Arab Israeli conflict filling our TV screens at the moment. Lord, we pray for Peace.

We pray for those who are being repressed, even terrorised, by their own Governments. Rohinjas in Myanmar, Chinese Uighurs, Kurdish people in Turkey and Syria. May those in positions of power be merciful and just.

Many inhumanities are carried out in the name of religion, we think of sectarian violence between Islamic sects in Iraq, between Hindu and Muslim in the Indian sub-continent and nearer to home, in Ireland. We pray that people should understand and follow Your wonderful example of love.

We pray for those suffering abuse or injustices in our communities. Problems often unseen but known only too painfully by people who we might pass in the street. Loving Lord, be with them in their despair, a beacon of hope in their darkness.

And we pray also for ourselves. You have called us to be Your Pentecostal servants here and now, to bring Your message of love to Your people, making You known so that that all the world may know that You are Lord, the Lord of all, the Lord of Life itself.

Hymn: Speak, O Lord, as we come to you Keith Getty and Stuart Townend **StF 161**

1. Speak, O Lord, as we come to you
to receive the food of your holy word.
Take your truth, plant it deep in us;
shape and fashion us in your likeness,
that the light of Christ might be seen
today
in our acts of love and our deeds of faith.
Speak, O Lord, and fulfil in us
All your purposes, for your glory.

2. Teach us, Lord, full obedience,
holy reverence, true humility.
Test our thoughts and our attitudes
in the radiance of your purity.
Cause our faith to rise, cause our eyes to
see
your majestic love and authority.
Words of power that can never fail;
let their truth prevail over unbelief.

3. Speak, O Lord, and renew our minds;
help us grasp the heights of your plans
for us.
Truths unchanged from the dawn of time
that will echo through to eternity.
And by grace we'll stand on your
promises,
and by faith we'll walk as you walk with
us.
Speak, O lord, till your Church is built
and the earth is filled with your glory.

Blessing:

Go and live with God's Spirit within you. Go and reach out to all you meet. Go and help others to know the love of Christ Jesus.

Amen

The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Love of God and the Fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with us all evermore.

Amen