

worship



notes

from the United Reformed Church

Sunday 10th May 2026
The Sixth Sunday of Easter
The Revd Matt Stone

Call to Worship

Like the wind which stirred the waters of creation, **God is moving in us.**
Like the holy fire burning in the desert, **God is living in us.**
Like the wind which drove back the waters of the Red Sea, **God is acting in us.**
Like the breath which stirred the dry bones in the valley, **God is breathing in us.**
Like the dove resting on the baptised Messiah, **God is blessing us.**
Like the healing hands of Jesus, **God is healing us.**
Like the last choking breath of a man on a cross, **God is dying for us.**
Like the power that rose Jesus from the dead, **God is offering new life to us.**
Like the fire that falls on Pentecost, **God is empowering us.**

Prayers of Approach, Confession and Offertory

Father God, our Creator,
we praise you for your amazing love, and for the gift of life.
We're sorry that we've not always trusted you,
listened to you, or obeyed you as we should.
We've failed to love you as you have loved us,
and we've failed to love others.
Too often, we've hoarded your gifts,
and not shown others the mercy we have been shown.
We give you thanks that you haven't given up on us in our sin.
Instead, from the very beginning,
you planned to send your Son, Jesus Christ,
not to condemn the world, but to save it.

Lord Jesus Christ,
we remember your costly sacrifice:
Your cry in the Garden: "Not my will, but yours be done."
Your cry from the cross: "Father, forgive them,
for they do not know what they are doing."
And your cry from the resurrection: "Peace be with you."

Holy Spirit,
we thank you that you are God with us and in us.
Comfort us in our loneliness and grief.
Fill our hearts with divine love,

and shape us from the inside out
that we might be humble, obedient and faithful disciples.

We offer ourselves and our gifts to you now,
that they may be used and transformed
for the sake of your Kingdom and glory. Amen.

We share in the words of the Lord's Prayer, Our Father...

Reading

St John 14: 15-21

All-Age Activity

In today's Bible passage, Jesus speaks of the coming Holy Spirit. For an all-age activity, you could explore different Biblical images for the Holy Spirit with visual aids:

- A lit candle – the Holy Spirit as fire. You could link this to the tongues of fire in Acts 2, or the idea of a refining fire. Fire was used by silversmiths, for example, to remove the impurities in silver. Similarly, God wants to refine us – to remove our sin, and make us pure.
- A jug of water – the Holy Spirit as living water. Water cleanses and refreshes. Water gives life, and the Spirit makes us fully alive in God (see John 4:13-14 and 7:37-39).
- A fan – the Holy Spirit as wind or breath. You could link this to Acts 2, and/or to Jesus's words to Nicodemus in John 3:8. The Holy Spirit can be wind in our sails – power and direction.
- A bowl of fruit – linking to the fruit of the Holy Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23). The Holy Spirit wants to help us become more like Jesus, filling us with divine love (Romans 5:5), and helping us to obey Jesus' commands.

These visual aids can also be adapted into prayer stations, where you invite people to consider how the Holy Spirit might be at work (or want to be at work) in their lives.

Sermon Notes

John 14 comes at the Last Supper, when Jesus is trying to prepare his disciples for what is to come. Jesus has washed their feet – and told them to do likewise. Jesus has predicted his betrayal, and Peter's denial. Jesus has tried to comfort his disciples – reminding them that he is going ahead of them to prepare a place for them, and calling them to faith. Now, Jesus talks about the Holy Spirit, who God will send.

There are several different themes that could be the focus of a sermon:

- Jesus's words "If you love me, you will keep my commandments" (v.15). You could

explore the connection between love and obedience, or unpack the commandments that Jesus gives in the Gospels (e.g. in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5-7; Mark 11:22-24; John 3:7; 13:14; 15:4,9,12). What might this look like in practice?

- The person of the Holy Spirit. What does ‘Advocate’ mean? (note ‘Comforter’ and ‘Counsellor’ are used in other translations). This was my focus, unpacking the Greek word used there: ‘paraclete’. ‘Para’ means to ‘come alongside’. Think of a paramedic, for example, a medic who comes alongside to offer medical care. In the same way, God’s Spirit comes alongside us. Then there’s the second part ‘clete’, which means ‘to call’ or ‘to direct’. The Spirit’s not just passive, like a Comforter, listening to our cares and nodding approvingly. The Spirit is also active: one who calls and directs us, and challenges us to live differently. The focus of my sermon was on unpacking these two sides to the Spirit’s work and what they mean for us today. I then focus on the word ‘Advocate’, and consider how Jesus advocates for us before the Father (that we might continue to be forgiven – see 1 John 2:1) and before the world (that we might be witnesses to Jesus and God’s coming kingdom – see Luke 12:12).
- An alternative way to unpack the work of the Holy Spirit is to consider Jesus’s words that the Spirit is “the Spirit of truth”. What does that mean? How might we experience the Spirit leading us into truth? Why can’t the world accept the Spirit’s work or ministry? It would also be possible to delve deeper into the Spirit’s presence with us – and in us. Jesus says, “he abides in you.” This leads Jesus to discuss the unity of the Father and the Son, and the unity we can have with Jesus.

Prayers of Intercession

Holy Spirit, Comforter,
we pray for all those who need your comfort today:

...those who are grieving the loss of loved ones.
...those struggling with poor physical and mental health.
...those facing personal battles with addictions.
...those trapped in poverty and systems of injustice.

May they know your presence, receive your hope, and be touched by your joy.

Holy Spirit, Advocate and Counsellor,
we pray for all those who need your vision and direction today:

...for political leaders, that they will use their power for the good of all people.
...for young people considering what to do with their lives. Give them wisdom to discern the gifts you have given them, and the call you are placing on their lives.
...for our denomination, Synods and local churches, that we will be open and responsive to wherever you would lead us.

May we know your leading, and be bold in love and witness,
sharing in the life of your kingdom. Amen.

Blessing

St Irenaeus, back in the second century, said that “The glory of God is man fully alive.” In Irenaeus’s original writings, he was talking about Jesus – Jesus is the image of the invisible God, “man fully alive.” Down the ages (like many quotes) the original context has been forgotten, and it’s been applied to humanity at large. But there is at least a grain of truth in the misquote. When we are born again of the Spirit, God’s image in us starts to be repaired and restored. We become, slowly but surely, with prayer and persistence, more like Jesus. As we go from here today:

the dove of the Spirit announces God’s presence and blessing with us.
The fire of God’s Spirit refines us like silver.
The living water of the Spirit brings new life – and flows from us to bless others.
And the breath of the Spirit puts wind in our sails,
giving new gifts, empowering and direction.
May we, like the saints who’ve gone before us,
become more fully alive - to the glory of God. Amen.

In Addition to the Compendium of Eastertide Hymns suggested here
<https://urc.org.uk/your-faith/prayer-and-worship/worship-notes/>

Matt suggests

	RS	CH4	StF	MP
Come, Holy Ghost	751	586	373	90
Holy Spirit, we welcome you			385	241
O Holy Spirit, breathe on me				500
O let the Son of God enfold you				502
O Thou who camest from above	433	625		525
Spirit of the living God	308	619/620	395	613
The Spirit lives to set us free			397	664
Purify my heart (Refiner’s fire)			508	921
O God of burning, cleansing flame				1004
Love Divine All Loves Excelling	663	519	503	449

RS – *Rejoice & Sing* | CH4 – *Church Hymnary 4* | StF – *Singing the Faith* | MP – *Mission Praise*