

worship notes

from the United Reformed Church



Sunday 24th May 2026

Day of Pentecost

The Rev'd Jessica

Ashcroft-Townsley

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!

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,
or 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.

All Age Activity

"Spirit's Web"

Materials:

- One long length of red yarn, wool, or ribbon (how long will vary by the size of your congregation, you will want it to be long enough for everyone to hold a part of it)

Introduce the activity:

"Today is Pentecost: the day we remember God's Spirit being poured out on all flesh. In our readings, we will hear that the Spirit didn't just stay in one place or rest with one person. God's Spirit moved among many and drew them together."

Hold up the red thread and **say**:

"This is just a simple ball of red thread, but it's going to help us think about what it means to be the Body of Christ."

Hold one end of the thread and **pass the ball** of yarn to someone nearby.

Invite that person to hold part of it, too, and **pass the ball** of yarn to the next (and on and on). This should create a loose web.

Look around and say:

"Take a look for a moment. What do you notice?"

In the Hebrew Bible, God's Spirit rests on many people, even those no one expected. Then, in the New Testament, the Spirit came into the room like fire, not just as a tiny flame, but many."

Gently tug the thread and **say**:

"Do you feel that? When one person moves, everyone feels it. That's what it's like to be the Body of Christ. God's Spirit moves not just withing one, but within all. Connecting us. Enlivening us!"

Invite one person to let go of the thread **and say**:

"When one person lets go, the shape changes, which shows us the impact of every person to shape the faith and the world. Every one of us matters."

Close by offering a short reflection, such as:

"The good news of Pentecost is that God's Spirit weaves us together as one. One Spirit, many people, One body. None are left out; all are one."

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.

Readings

Numbers 11:24-30 | Acts 2:1-21

“Woven by the Spirit”

The Holy Spirit is not given to a few, but poured out on many. It weaves individuals into one Body, alive with God’s presence and purpose. Pentecost is not simply about dramatic signs, but about something deeper and more grounded: connection. We are not alone. God’s Spirit suddenly and dramatically moves among ordinary people, forms them into community, and calls the church into a shared life and witness. Let’s get into it!

Sermon structure:

a) Intro

Begin by grounding Pentecost in experience rather than spectacle. Pentecost is often imagined as wind, fire, noise, and movement. And there’s certainly plenty of scriptural evidence for that. Yet, beneath the dramatic is a subtler, quieter truth: God’s Spirit is interested in creating and fostering relationship. The Spirit of God does not isolate or elevate a select few; it draws people together. You might use the image from the All Ages Moment: a red thread, simple on its own, yet strong, meaningful, and connected when it is shared. It’s about community! You might like to explore: What if Pentecost isn’t about individual empowerment, but about being woven into the life of God *and* one another?

b) Scriptural Analysis

Numbers 11:24-30 arises in a context of exhaustion and strain. Moses is overwhelmed and burdened by leadership and God’s people are restless, hungry, and loudly complaining in the wilderness. Into this space, God responds, but not in the expected ways. Moses may want to throw in the proverbial towel, but God does not remove Moses or silence the complainers. Instead, God shares the Spirit that rests on Moses with others. Authority in this passage then is not diminished; it is widened. This is an opportunity to reflect on how God’s power often shows up in our moments of limitation or weakness.

Following on from the earlier in Numbers 11, 70 elders gather around the Tent of Meeting and the Spirit rests on them as expected, so that Moses does not carry the burden alone. But while 70 are at the tent prophesying, the Spirit also rests on two other men, Eldad and Medad, who are off prophesying in the camp. This is a moment that disrupts assumptions about where holiness belongs and who may speak. It shows, again, that God’s Spirit is bigger than authorised spaces or recognised roles. For dissenting people and churches like the United Reformed Church, that’s good news!

Like many comfortable with tradition and status quo (like Joshua son of Nun), some of the people in the narrative struggle with change and the wideness of God, fearing a loss of control. They ask Moses to stop Eldad and Medad, and, in a moment of well-

modelled humility (and maybe because he's exhausted), Moses replies, "If only all God's people were prophets and had the Spirit upon them!" Moses trusts and puts his faith in the movement of God's Spirit rather than in the accepted human order.

This story shows a *glimpse* of a people fully alive with God's Spirit, preparing us to better understand its fulfilment in what happens in that room in Jerusalem 1,475-1,500 years later.

This brings us to **Acts 2:1-21** the traditional, favourite Pentecost reading. The Spirit of God comes to a people gathered in one place, who are waiting with no clear plan except obedience and trust. This a moment that starts in stillness and shared presence to become a reminder that the Spirit often moves among people who remain open, expectant, faithful, and together.

The Spirit of God arrives with sound and movement. As described by Luke in Acts 2, this is a spectacular show: roaring wind filling the house, fire like tongues resting on each person. These ancient signs indicate that the miracle they are witnessing is more than mere spectacle. It is a sacred moment. Each person received the Spirit and then begins to speak not to erase difference, but to animate it.

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. I always chuckle when Peter raises his voice among them with a gentle correction: "They're not drunk—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 what, for some, was a chaotic moment—connecting it to tradition and making it clear that Pentecost is not a one-time event, but an ongoing promise. The Spirit of God is poured upon all flesh. This marks, of course, the birth of the Church: a community of shared Spirit and witness who are called to live visibly as the Body of Christ in the world.

c) *Weaving the threads*

As we weave the threads together, we might try using one of these approaches:

- From tent to street: trace the movement of the Spirit from the Tent of Meeting (Numbers) to the gathered house in Jerusalem (act) and out into public life today. Use examples from your life or the life of the church. Emphasise how God's Spirit consistently moves beyond the expected or designated spaces.
- From control to trust: Contrast Joshua's instinct to restrain Eldad and Medad with Peter's willingness to interpret and trust the Spirit's movement. You might explore how we respond to anxiety in our own lives, encouraging the courage to "let go and let God."
- One Spirit, many voices: highlight the diversity of voices, locations, and languages explored in both passages. Particularly in our world, where

difference is often maligned, the church is called to run counter to this. Difference isn't a threat; it is evidence of the Spirit's presence. You might reflect on how the Day of Pentecost and the Spirit's movement encourages inclusion, listening, and belonging within the Body of Christ.

- The Spirit as weaver: connecting back to the All Ages Moment, you might use weaving as a central metaphor, emphasising connection, interdependence, and shared life in God's Spirit. This might be a good opportunity to gently challenge individualistic understandings of faith (my instinct would be to tread lightly here, not maligning personal relationship with God, but encouraging the way that relationship calls us back into community).
- If you know the congregation well and they are willing, you might open this to conversation. Invite folks to share their experiences of God's Spirit moving in their lives. Sometimes we don't know what is possible until we have heard the experiences of others. Where has God surprised people in their own journeys?

d) Drawing it all together

You might conclude by drawing Pentecost into the life of the church today. Remind people that Pentecost is not finished: the same Spirit still moves, still surprises, still connects. Just as we saw with the red thread, the church is not a collection of separated strands, but one body, woven by love. You might leave people with a final image or question like: what happens when we notice the tug of the Spirit through one another? How will we respond? How might we loosen our grip on control and trust the Spirit's work among us? Thinking about Eldad and Medad, how might God be speaking from the edges of the Church or society today?

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.

The Apostles' Creed

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 (or singing): *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.

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.

Suggested Hymns				
	RS	CH4	StF	MP
Come, Holy Spirit...			374	818
Let every Christian pray			388	
Lord, speak to me, that I may speak	613	542		444
Breathe on me breath of God	295	596	370	67
Come down, O Love Divine	294	489	372	89
The love of God comes close	107		654	940
Come, Spirit, all our hearts inspire	312			
Come, Holy Spirit, descend on us (Come all you people)		589		
Like Fireworks in the Night		584		
Come Holy Ghost Our Souls Inspire	751	586		90
Praise the Spirit in Creation		588		
Holy Spirit Gift Bestower		590	383	
Like The Murmur of The Dove's Song		592	389	
Enemy of Apathy		593	393	
Come, Holy Spirit, come!		594		
O Breath of Life, Come Sweeping Through Us	302	595	391	488
Loving Spirit, Loving Spirit	326	597		

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