

May I speak in the name of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Happy birthday to you! Dear friends, happy birthday to you! It's the feast of Pentecost, the day we mark the coming of the Holy Spirit onto the disciples after Jesus' ascension. It was that moment we say, that is when the Church started – the Church's birthday. And as we're all part of the universal Church, that means it's our birthday too.

And as it's a celebration, it's only right that we dress for the occasion. Today I'm in my party gear, my beautiful red waistcoat, with no shame whatsoever.

I do have a friend who, every Pentecost, would come to church wearing leggings with gigantic flames all down the legs. Quite rightly she's now an Anglican priest. I haven't got a pair of those fire leggings myself by the way but I'm sure Fr Simon has somewhere.

We're celebrating the coming of the Holy Spirit into the life of the people of God. We heard in our second reading an account of what happened. The disciples, Mary Jesus' mother, Mary Magdalene and the other followers were meeting every day to pray. They'd been with Jesus throughout his earthly life. They'd witnessed his suffering and death and his extraordinary rising. And they'd watched as he went back to the place he came from, back to the Father.

And now they wait, and pray. Jesus promised they wouldn't be left alone. The Spirit of God would come to them in a *new way*. The same Spirit that was there right at the start of creation, as Genesis tells us. The same Spirit that parted the waves of the sea so the Israelites could escape from slavery. That spoke through the prophets; that worked with and through Jesus.

It's this Spirit, the third person in the Trinity of God the Father, Son and Spirit, who broke into the world in a new way that Pentecost – coming down like tongues of fire onto ordinary people like you and me, baptizing them, making them more deeply alive.

What is this Spirit like?

Our readings give us a clue.

Jesus calls her “the Spirit of truth”; the one who guides us and reveals the truth about things.

We're given a sign of this in that very first Pentecost. When the Spirit comes upon the disciples, suddenly they can communicate in new ways. They can speak

directly to people about Jesus, in their native languages, in ways people would most easily understand.

It was a miracle of communication for the disciples. But it also gives us a sign of who the Spirit is and what she does.

Sometimes the Spirit might work in incredible events like that first Pentecost. But more often, its work is quieter.

The Spirit works by finding ways to connect people, breaking down barriers, building new relationships. And she does that by helping us to see things in a new way. She helps us see the *truth* about who we really are. The deepest truth is that is that we are loved, utterly, unbreakably, by God; the God who revealed his love for us in Jesus, by coming to us, suffering and dying for us, giving everything for us.

That's the truth the Spirit wants us to see, and to show other people. And the Spirit helps us to do that by nudging; whispering to us; finding ways to build communion between us. That's what the fire of the Spirit does.

This is something going on in all our lives, whether we're aware of it or not. Remember the words of Peter in our reading, in response to that brilliant accusation that the disciples are drunk at nine o'clock in the morning. Peter says no, they're not drunk – they're joyful! He says the coming of the Spirit was foretold long ago, and it was said that through the Spirit people would prophesy – which means seeing the *truth*, speaking the truth, which is about God's love.

And it was said this Spirit would be working among “*all flesh*”, among sons and daughters, young men and old men, slaves and the oppressed and the poor. The Spirit would work among everyone, including me and you – whether we know it or not.

It can be very hard, though, in the busyness of our lives, to see this. Sometimes it's only by looking back that we can see where we've been nudged; where we've been called to.

Where might the Spirit have been working in your life?

Maybe there's a time in your life when something very good happened that you can't quite explain. A moment when for some inexplicable reason you felt moved to do something, say something, that gave someone hope. A moment when you found you were in the right place at the right time and were the right person to show someone that they are loved. Even if you didn't realise it, you were revealing

the truth of God's love. Those are Spirit moments. That's the Spirit working through us.

Or maybe, there was a time in your life when you felt a nudge to stand up for justice; to call out unfairness and discrimination even if it cost you to do so. Maybe that's been you, or someone you know. Those are Spirit moments too. In our reading Jesus says the Spirit is the Spirit of truth, and the *advocate* – the one who will “prove the world wrong about sin and righteousness and judgement”. What he means is – the Spirit is like a lawyer in a courtroom. The Spirit points to evil in the world and says the truth – ‘evil will not win. It will not last’. When we stand up for justice; when we turn away from all that damages us, and others, and the world; when we make sacrifices for others out of love – that's the Spirit working through us.

Or maybe for you, the Spirit moments occur when you're at your lowest. Jesus says the Spirit is the Spirit of truth, and the advocate, and the *consoler* – the one who is with us in our brokenness and suffering. Sometimes it's when we're at the very bottom of the pit that we turn around and find we're not alone. That God is with us, sharing in our pain. And promising us that the suffering we face will not last for ever, but God's love will.

That's the truth the Spirit is telling us. And when we show that to other people, by being with them in their pain – that's the Spirit working through us.

In the last few weeks, I've tried to pay more attention to the Spirit's nudges; to the ways she might be working in my life. And there have been a few moments where things happened that I can't really explain, but where the truth of God's love for me and for all things seemed revealed again. And these, I think, must be Spirit moments.

There was a time when one morning, someone from a local business came here unexpectedly, to drop off some food. We can't usually accept perishable donations, and I wasn't sure if it would keep. But later that day, someone came here who said her cupboards were empty and she needed bread – and we were able to give it to her. The nudges that the donor had felt that day, and the nudges that the lady felt. That felt like a Spirit moment.

There was a time when I was busy by myself downstairs, doing odd jobs – and I suddenly thought, I'll stick my head in the church to see if anyone's about. There was a person here who had just popped in for a moment. They were going through a really difficult time. We talked, and we prayed; we prayed for God's consolation.

It felt, to me, like we'd been nudged by the Spirit to be there at that point. It felt like a Spirit moment.

And there was a time when I was walking with someone along a riverbank, and we were talking about the world and God and God's love. And I mentioned one of my favourite passages in the bible, from the Book of Revelation, which gives a vision of our final future: "God will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more."

We were talking about this, and we turned a corner, and suddenly we saw, in the water, a statue of a man, rising up. It was a tribute to those who have died of aids. And next to it, there was a plaque that said: "Grief is not forever, but love is". It was like someone had been listening to our conversation, guiding our feet, and was saying to us, 'yes'. It was truth being revealed. A Spirit moment.

Where might the Spirit be working in your life? The Spirit who reveals the truth; the advocate who calls us to justice; the consoler who is alongside us, always.

Let's take a moment to reflect on this. As we do so, I invite you to hold in your hand one of these stones, which hopefully you picked up as you came in. Don't worry if you didn't. But if you did, hold it now.

These are gifts prepared for us by our children in Crafty Church, and by our guests at Warm Welcome, our community drop-in on Wednesdays. They were prepared by this community for this community with love. They symbolise the fire of the Holy Spirit, that goes out from the light of Easter and works in all of us.

As you hold your stone, ask the Spirit to show you where God is working in your life. Where God wants you to be.

We'll hold the silence, and then I'll finish with a prayer. Come, Holy Spirit.



Spirit of God, Renew us with your fire today.

Give us the eyes to see, the ears to hear, the hearts to feel where you are in our lives.

Help us to see the truth of your love for us. Help us to show that love to the world.

Amen.