

the same Spirit distributes them. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but in all of them and in everyone it is the same God at work.

"Different... gifts, but.... the same God at work" – explaining through the Trinity how the diversity of gifting all represents a single purpose.

7 Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good.

"To each one... for the common good – all contribute a gift or gifts which build up the fellowship and also bring God's presence to the wider world.

8-10 To one there is given through the Spirit a message of wisdom, to another a message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit, to another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, to another distinguishing between spirits, to another speaking in different kinds of tongues, and to still another the interpretation of tongues.

"To one... to another" – not a prescriptive list. Many will experience all of these gifts at different

REFLECTION Half a century ago the present experience of the gifts of the Spirit was held to be more controversial than today, when we know we need all the supernatural help we can get, to reach an increasingly distant world. God-given insights, wisdom and faith for what God wants to do, help us to show people that God loves them and understands their situations, and bring the team dynamic of 'every member ministry' that changes our outlook. The human authors inspired to write the NT fully expected that hearers would have a post-resurrection and post-Pentecost perspective of the Holy Spirit's empowering to live and witness for Jesus. That is the nature of the mission partnership we are all called into.

QUESTION *Pentecost has happened – and the Holy Spirit and His gifts have been given. Where and when do we make room for them and expect them to enable us?*

PRAYER Lord God Almighty, from the beginning You planned to send Your Son to be our way of salvation. You always intended to send Your Spirit for the whole church everywhere, that we might know the close presence of Jesus and share in His continuing ministry and mission. May we catch a fresh excitement about what You are doing, and calling us into, at the present time. With many asking spiritual questions and turning to You to find hope, peace and meaning, empower us all to speak out and explain what You are doing at this time, and what Your good plans and purposes are. Out of crisis, bring revival in the new life of Jesus! Amen.

The Living Word for the next week, from Wednesday – www.thelivingword.uk

times as the situation demands, but may have a particular facility in one or two. Spiritual gifts enliven prayer meetings, home groups and personal ministry, which are closer to the Early Church pattern, more so than front-led meetings.

11 All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and He distributes them to each one, just as He determines.

"The work of... the same Spirit" – the repetition from v.7 "the manifestation of the Spirit" forms a literary bracket which conveys emphasis. Gifts were to be seen as God working in partnership, not as any individual's enhanced spirituality.

12 Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ.

13 For we were all baptised by one Spirit so as to form one body – whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free – and we were all given the one Spirit to drink.

"Many parts... form one body" – an important theme which Paul develops further. The Holy Spirit brings spiritual insight, and works God's purposes in earthly situations, but in a way which requires our humble inter-dependence. The body needs every part, and no part defines the body, but Christ does.

The Living Word

Bible readings for Sunday, May 31, 2020, with explanatory notes

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Bible study on the Revised Common Lectionary passages for **May 31**

Prepare by reading the Bible passages beforehand – read again to reflect on the pulpit teaching

Pentecost: **All are on the team now in the power of the Spirit**

Psalms 104:24-34, 35b – All of God's creation is subject to Him

John 20:19-23 – The disciples receive a foretaste of Pentecost

Acts 2:1-21 – The outpouring of the Spirit that moves all into mission

1 Corinthians 12:3-13 – The Spirit's different gifts all work together

Psalm 104:24-34, 35b – All of God's creation is subject to Him

Everything that lives is sustained by God's breath

24 How many are Your works, LORD! In wisdom You made them all; the earth is full of Your creatures.

"Your words, LORD" – the psalm praises God for His life-giving involvement with His creation.

25-26 There is the sea, vast and spacious, teeming with creatures beyond number – living things both large and small. There the ships go to and fro, and Leviathan, which You formed to frolic there.

"Leviathan, which You formed" – a frightening sea monster which only God, who created it, can overcome. Also the identity of a demonic principality.

27 All creatures look to You to give them their food at the proper time.

28 When You give it to them, they gather it up; when You open Your hand, they are satisfied with good things.

29-30 When You hide Your face, they are terrified; when You take away their breath, they die and return to the dust. When

You send Your Spirit, they are created, and You renew the face of the ground.

"Breath" – and "Spirit" are the same expression.

"When You send Your Spirit" – in another Psalm David pleads with God not to take away His Spirit and hence equipping for his royal task. Ezekiel and Jeremiah prophesied about God giving His people a "new spirit" and new heart to live His way.

• **For further study**, read Ezekiel 36:26-27, Jeremiah 24:7, 32:39, Ezekiel 11:19.

31-32 May the glory of the LORD endure forever; may the LORD rejoice in His works – He who looks at the earth, and it trembles, who touches the mountains, and they smoke.

33 I will sing to the LORD all my life; I will sing praise to my God as long as I live.

34 May my meditation be pleasing to Him, as I rejoice in the LORD. But may sinners vanish from the earth and the wicked be no more. Praise the LORD, my soul. Praise the LORD.

"May my meditation be pleasing" – recognising that sin pollutes God's creation.

REFLECTION God's diverse creation all works together, sustained by Him and under His control. God's breath or Spirit is the life-breath of everything created, and also a renewing dynamic – which points to the move of renewal that is Pentecost.

QUESTION *The Holy Spirit's renewing work brings change – how much do you want to preserve how things are?*

John 20:19-23 – The disciples receive a foretaste of Pentecost

Jesus' initial impartation prepares them to receive more

19 On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jewish leaders, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!"

"Jesus came and stood" – with a real physical body, a miraculous, but not ghostly, appearance.

20 After He said this, He showed them His hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord.

"His hands and side" – Jesus identifies Himself,

REFLECTION This is not unlike our experience of receiving Jesus into our hearts and being born again. As we come to a decision for Him, Jesus reveals Himself to us with a transforming impartation of the Holy Spirit. We know we are now part of God's plan for salvation, with an important message for others. Any encounter with Jesus and the Holy Spirit makes us more receptive, and thirsty for more – just the preparation the disciples needed.

QUESTION *Thinking about this impartation, do we limit what God wants to give us?*

Acts 2:1-21 – The outpouring of the Spirit moves all into mission

The prophecy fulfilled: all are empowered to speak out God's purposes

1 When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place.

"Day of Pentecost" – 50th day after the Sabbath of Passover, therefore the first day of the week. Pentecost (also Weeks, Harvest and Firstfruits in Judaism) was said to be when Moses received the Law. Now the Spirit is outpoured to fulfil the promise of the law and prophets, and inaugurate the New Covenant.

• **For further study**, see Leviticus 23:15-16; Deuteronomy 16:10; Exodus 23:16, Numbers 28:26.

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.

"A violent wind... fire" – signs of the intense presence of God. John the Baptist said that the Messiah would baptise "with the Holy Spirit and fire", Luke 3:16.

4 All of them were filled with the Holy

showing that He did not feign death, but conquered it.

21 Again Jesus said, "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent Me, I am sending you."

22 And with that He breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit.

"He breathed on them" – an initial impartation preparing the way for the Pentecost outpouring.

23 If you forgive anyone's sins, their sins are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven."

"Their sins are forgiven" – by God. All believers are now involved in declaring that God is ready to forgive those that repent and believe.

Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.

"All of them" – probably the 120 including the women as in Joel's prophecy vv.17-18. The New Covenant starts by releasing the restricted spiritual leadership of the OT and empowering all.

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.

"Heard their own language" – tongues here is a sign to the very mixed festival crowd hearing their own dialects and languages. Later the gift of tongues would be a heavenly praise and prayer language not generally understood by others, unless (today's experience) as a faith-raising sign to them.

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?

9-11 Parthians, Medes and Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene; visitors from Rome (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?"

"What does this mean?" – hearing the wonders of God in a way personal to them was a sign.

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.

"Peter... addressed the crowd" – speaking with gravity now as a leader and explaining, "This is that..." and taking them back to familiar words from Joel, v.16.

15 "These people are not drunk, as you suppose. It's only nine in the morning!

16-17 "No, this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel: '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.

"In the last days" – or "afterward" in Hebrew, making a contrast with the Old Covenant. The New Covenant has come, and the old restricted access to God has been opened to all.

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

"They will prophesy" – not so much foretelling as 'forthtelling', inspired to declare God's 'now' word.

9 '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.' "

"Everyone who calls... will be saved" – overturning the general understanding of Judaism. The Holy Spirit has been released to the whole world of men, women, son, daughters, Jews and Gentiles – any can turn to Jesus and receive the Spirit.

REFLECTION If we were in a gathering of other nationalities and heard English words praising God, we'd know God wanted our attention and we would "listen carefully" to what God wanted for our lives. The explanation was challenging: women and young people would be God's spokespersons, like men; and anyone, not just Jews, could come to God by calling on Jesus to be saved. The way of relationship with God won by Jesus is for anyone who will turn to Him. Who is tasked with making this known? We are, but we have to learn God's ways to do it. Pentecost changed everything, for ever – unless Pentecost doesn't change us.

QUESTION *How much do we reflect Pentecost in our lives and gatherings? What might God be saying about that?*

1 Corinthians 12:3-13 – The Spirit's different gifts all work together

The creative diversity is like the different parts which comprise one body

3 Therefore I want you to know that no one who is speaking by the Spirit of God says, "Jesus be cursed," and no one can say, "Jesus is Lord," except by the Holy Spirit.

"Speaking by the Spirit of God" – what we say

shows whether or not the heart is renewed by the Spirit of God. Jews who did not believe Jesus was the Messiah condemned Him as cursed by God because He died on a 'tree', Deut. 21:23. By dying a shameful death Jesus released all who believe in Him from shame and the law's curse, into the original blessing of Abraham, Gal. 3:13-14.

4-6 There are different kinds of gifts, but