

Sunday 23rd May 2021 - PENTECOST & ALDERSGATE Sunday

Rev'd Danny Wheadon - "...to know God's love in my life"

We invite you to spend a few moments with God, using this short act of worship that has been prepared for you to use knowing that other people are sharing this act of worship with you.

Call to worship & Lighting of Candle

Lord, help us to look out and listen for your Holy Spirit. May we welcome you with open hearts and minds. Call us, inspire us, surprise us and challenge us. Give us confidence & calm assurance. Lead us to your power and love.
Amen.

Singing the Faith 385

1 Holy Spirit, we welcome You,

Holy Spirit, we welcome You!
Move among us with holy fire
as we lay aside all earthly desire,
hands reach out and our hearts aspire.
Holy Spirit, Holy Spirit,
Holy Spirit, we welcome You!

2 Holy Spirit, we welcome You,
Holy Spirit, we welcome You!
Let the breeze of Your presence blow
that Your children here might truly
know how to move in the Spirit's flow.
Holy Spirit, Holy Spirit,
Holy Spirit, we welcome You!

3 Holy Spirit, we welcome You,
Holy Spirit, we welcome You!
Please accomplish in us today
some new work of loving grace, we
pray - unreservedly - have Your way.
Holy Spirit, Holy Spirit,
Holy Spirit, we welcome You!

A prayer of approach

Spirit of compassion, we bring you our hearts. Spirit of discernment, we bring you our choices. Spirit of wisdom, we bring you our minds. Spirit of boldness, we bring you our words. Spirit of fulfilment, we bring you our longings. Spirit of abundance, we bring you our resources. Spirit of creation, we bring you our lives. Amen.

A prayer of adoration

We praise you, God of all time, for speaking to us through the tongues of Pentecost, for stirring our longings with the excitement of Pentecost, for uniting our communities with the inclusiveness of Pentecost. Fill our lives, we pray, with the enormity of Pentecost, until they overflow with compassion and commitment to care for and celebrate all creation to the glory of your name. Amen.

A prayer of confession and an Assurance of forgiveness

Forgive us, Creator God,
when we have not heard your voice
in the song of the birds and the rustle
of leaves: Open the ears of our
hearts. When we have not seen you
in the grandeur of the mountains and

the rhythm of the waves:
Open the eyes of our hearts.
When we have not rejoiced at the
vibrance of spring or the colours of
autumn: Unlock the joy in our hearts.
When we have stifled your Spirit and
confined your love: Deepen the love
in our hearts. Forgive us, and release
in us the true Spirit of Pentecost.
Today and always. Amen.

Assurance of forgiveness

Gracious God, ignite our prayers
with the life-giving fire of Pentecost,
that we may not fear our
inadequacy, our hesitancy or our
doubt, but bring before you all that
we are, all that we have been, and all
that we can be.

May we know that we can never aim
high enough, and never conceive
anything complete enough, to
prepare us for all you would bless us
with – individually, as communities
and as nations.

Help us to gather together and wait
for you afresh, trusting your love,
mercy and forgiveness. Amen.

A prayer of praise and thanksgiving

Living God, thank you for the energy
of Pentecost, for the promises
fulfilled, for the lives changed, for the
hearts touched, for the power
unleashed, for the overflowing of
your Spirit into our world.
In Jesus' name. Amen.

Thy Kingdom Come

sung to Eventide (Abide with me)

We seek your kingdom
throughout every sphere - We long for
heaven's demonstration here
Jesus your light shine bright for all to see
Transform, revive, and heal society

Before all things,
in him were all things made
Inspiring culture, media, and trade
May all our work serve your economy
Transform, revive, and heal society

Peace, truth, and justice
reigning everywhere
With us be present in our public square
Fill all who lead with your integrity
Transform, revive, and heal society

Forgive us Lord, when we have not
engaged - Failing to scribe
your heart on history's page
Make us again what we were made to be
Transform, revive, and heal society

Faithful to govern ever may we be
Selfless in service, loving constantly
In everything may your authority
Transform, revive, and heal society

*Lyrics: Andy Flannagan, Noel Robinson,
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Music Music, Graham Hunter*



Psalm 130

¹ From the depths of despair, O Lord, I call for your help. ² Hear my cry, O Lord. Pay attention to my prayer. ³ Lord, if you kept a record of our sins, who, O Lord, could ever survive? ⁴ But you offer forgiveness, that we might learn to fear you. ⁵ I am counting on the Lord; yes, I am counting on him. I have put my hope in his word.

⁶ I long for the Lord more than sentries long for the dawn, yes, more than sentries long for the dawn. ⁷ O Israel, hope in the Lord; for with the Lord there is unfailing love. His redemption overflows. ⁸ He himself will redeem Israel from every kind of sin.

Romans 5:1-11

Therefore, since we have been made right in God's sight by faith, we have peace[a] with God because of what Jesus Christ our Lord has done for us.

² Because of our faith, Christ has brought us into this place of undeserved privilege where we now stand, and we confidently and joyfully look forward to sharing God's glory.

³ We can rejoice, too, when we run into problems and trials, for we know that they help us develop endurance. ⁴ And endurance develops strength of character, and character strengthens our confident hope of salvation. ⁵ And this hope will not lead to disappointment. For we know how dearly God loves us, because he has given us the Holy Spirit to fill our hearts with his love.

⁶ When we were utterly helpless, Christ came at just the right time and died for us sinners. ⁷ Now, most people would not be willing to die for an upright person, though someone might perhaps be willing to die for a person who is especially good. ⁸ But God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners. ⁹ And since we have been made right in God's sight by the blood of Christ, he will certainly save us from God's condemnation. ¹⁰ For since our friendship with God was restored by the death of his Son while we were still his enemies, we will certainly be saved through the life of his Son. ¹¹ So now we can rejoice in our wonderful new relationship with God because our Lord Jesus Christ has made us friends of God.

Singing the Faith 454

Where shall my wondering soul begin?

How shall I all to heaven aspire?

A slave redeemed from death and sin,
a brand plucked from eternal fire,
how shall I equal triumphs raise,
or sing my great deliverer's praise?

O how shall I the goodness tell,
Father, which thou to me hast showed?
That I, a child of wrath and hell,
I should be called a child of God,
should know, should feel my sins forgiven,
blest with this antepast of heaven!

3 And shall I slight my Father's love?
Or basely fear his gifts to own?
Unmindful of his favours prove?
Shall I, the hallowed cross to shun,
Refuse his righteousness to impart
by hiding it within my heart?

Outcasts, to you, yes, you, I call,
Christ's love invites you to believe!
He spreads his arms to embrace you all;
sinners alone his grace receive:
no need of him the righteous have;
he came the lost to seek and save.

Come, O my guilty kindred, come,
groaning beneath your load of sin!
His bleeding heart shall make you room,
his open side shall take you in;
he calls you now, invites you home:
Come, O my guilty kindred, come!

Charles Wesley (1707-1788)

REFLECTION/SERMON

To know God's love in my life?

Today, in the Christian calendar, is a special day we call Pentecost. The term Pentecost comes from the Greek Pentēkostē meaning "fiftieth". It refers to the Jewish festival celebrated on the fiftieth day after First Fruits, also known as the "Feast of Weeks" and the "Feast of 50 days" in rabbinic tradition. It's the day, 50 days after Easter, when Christians celebrate the coming of the Holy Spirit as the Scriptures and the Lord Jesus had promised. And today is doubly a special Sunday within the life of Methodism. Not only do we thank God for and welcome his Holy Spirit into our lives, but we also celebrate that time when both the brothers, Charles and John Wesley, came to full faith and knew, assuredly, of God's love for them.

It was 24 May 1738. John Wesley was almost 35 years old and had



John Wesley
(1703 - 1791)

been ordained for nearly 10 years. Both John and Charles Wesley had returned to England deeply dissatisfied with their spiritual state. Wesley first encountered the Moravians during a

difficult two-year mission to Georgia in North America, from which he had returned just six months earlier. During the journey, their ship had been struck by a severe storm, and shipwreck and death seemed inevitable to most onboard. What Wesley noticed was the calm assurance of the Moravians: confident in God's love and their salvation, they did not appear to fear death. Wesley did not have that assurance. Still heavily influenced by the Moravians they met with in London, the Wesleys joined a 'Religious Society', and in May 1738 both underwent a profound spiritual experience. John famously described this in his Journal entry for 24th May.

"In the evening I went very unwillingly to a society in Aldersgate Street, where one was reading Luther's preface to the Epistle to the Romans. About a quarter before nine, while he was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in

Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone for salvation, and an assurance was given me that he had taken away my sins, even mine and saved me from the law of sin and death."

John Wesley's experience at the Aldersgate meeting transformed his belief and preaching, ultimately leading to the formation of the Methodist Church. Without Aldersgate, Methodism as we know it today may not have happened. But Aldersgate is not just about the past, or just about John Wesley. His experience, so memorably and vividly expressed in his journal, demonstrates the difference it makes knowing God for ourselves. When one least expects it, even when things haven't turned out the way we hoped or when we feel we've heard it all before, there can be change. Change happens when we share the story. Wesley experienced this when someone else read to him Martin



The young John Wesley "a brand plucked from the burning"

Luther's Preface to Romans. Just as John Wesley felt his heart 'strangely warmed', we too can be refreshed and inspired by sharing our faith stories with each other.

Three days earlier, following his own 'conversion', Charles had written a hymn:

*Where shall my wondering soul begin
How shall I all to heaven aspire?
A slave redeemed from death and sin,
A brand plucked from eternal fire,
How shall I equal triumphs raise,
Or sing my great Deliverer's praise?*



*Charles Wesley
(1707 - 1788)*

Flowing from the complete assurance the brothers felt in God's love and forgiveness, their faith was lived out in lives that went on to influence millions. Charles went on to write over 6,000 hymns, while John used his organising genius to turn a spontaneous movement into a structured body which became the origin of today's world-wide Methodist Church.

"Where shall my wondering soul begin?" is a big hymn with language

that includes the line “a brand plucked from eternal fire”. It’s a biblical phrase (Zechariah 3:2) that John Wesley used to refer to himself, recalling his rescue as a small child from the burning manse in Epworth. The Old Rectory in Epworth was the Wesley family home until 1735. It was rebuilt after fire destroyed the original building 1709. It is suspected that this fire was an act of arson perpetrated by opponents of John's father, Samuel Wesley, the then Rector of Epworth.

The fire could have killed the five year-old John, but he escaped from a first floor window. He was afterwards referred to by his mother, Susanna, as "a brand plucked from the burning". Perhaps when John recalled this event he sensed that he wanted to make the most of the life for which he had been saved, and to give something back to God. The hymn is of course also appropriate for singing when recalling the beginnings of Methodism. Charles's *“conversion hymn”* also celebrates at any time a core belief of Methodists: It is a highly personal text, however, it declares that God’s grace is available to all and is gifted to us even before we seek it out. It is a fine congregational hymn that helps to harness a sense of shared thankfulness. Charles Wesley began writing this hymn two days after his “conversion” experience on 21 May 1738. His experience came at the

end of an intense period of trying to discover within himself reassurance of God’s love.



Peter Böhler, a German-born Moravian who was a spiritual mentor to Charles Wesley.

To Peter Böhler, Charles had expressed the hope that he would be saved “because I have used my best endeavours to serve God”, and was taken aback and frustrated when Böhler simply shook his head in implicit criticism of such an approach. That was in the February. In the months following, and in ill health, Charles met and stayed with John Bray, “a poor ignorant mechanic, who knows nothing by Christ, yet, by knowing him, knows and discerns all things”, and also found inspiration in Martin Luther’s ‘Commentary on Galatians’. Charles had confessed to Peter Böhler his “unbelief and want of forgiveness”.

On 21 May, he was settling down to sleep when John Bray’s sister, Mrs Turner, came to the door of his room

to offer him this message: “In the name of Jesus of Nazareth, arise and believe, and thou shalt be healed of all thy infirmities”. Accepting these as words offered by Christ himself, Charles found himself more relaxed, sensing God’s unconditional love more fully. “I now found myself at peace with God,” he wrote, “and rejoiced in hope of loving Christ. My temper for the rest of the day was mistrust of my own great, but before unknown, weakness (I humbly hope to be more and more so), yet confident of Christ’s protection.”

In “Where shall my wondering soul begin?” Charles Wesley celebrates his experience of God’s forgiving love as an “antepast [foretaste] of heaven” (v.2). He proclaims Jesus as someone who opens his arms to all “outcasts”, inviting all to believe. The use of the word, which metaphorically describes his own spiritual state, may also draw on his experience visiting the poor and those in prison while still a student in Oxford – a practice he took up again in earnest following his conversion, in particular in Newgate Prison and in the Marshalsea. The hymn was first published in an eight-verse version in *Hymns and Sacred Poems* (1739) with the heading, ‘*Christ the friend of sinners*’.

Whatever the situation we find ourselves in, Charles had discovered, it is only the grace of Christ that men and women need to accept in order to find themselves at home with God



The Marshalsea prison for debtors in the 18th century

(v.5). Such a gift is not at all dependent on our own good deeds – the “best endeavours” that Charles had described to Peter Böhler just a few months earlier, but on God’s desire to have us know him.

With grateful acknowledgement from resources on [singingthefait Plus](https://www.methodist.org.uk/our-faith/worship/singing-the-faith-plus/) website.

Singing the Faith 610

Best of all is God is with us,

God will hold and never fail.- Keep that truth when storms are raging, God remains though faith is frail.

Best of all is God is with us,
life goes on and needs are met,
God is strongest in our weakness.
Love renews, will not forget.

Best of all is God is with us, - hearts
are challenged, strangely warmed,
faith is deepened, courage strengthened,
grace received and hope reformed.

Best of all is God is with us,
in our joy and through our pain,
till that final acclamation:
'life is Christ, but death is gain'.

Best of all is God is with us
as we scale eternal heights,
love grows stronger, undiminished; -
earth grows dim by heaven's lights.

*Andrew E Pratt (born 1948 © 2008
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Prayers of intercession

Response after each bidding.

Breath of God:

Breath on them now.

For those around us, Lord, we pray.
For the lost and the lonely...
For the ill and the dying...
For the bewildered and confused...
For the tortured and trafficked...
For the abused and neglected...
For the grieving and broken...
For ... add your own biddings. Amen.

Lord, for tomorrow's world,
we pray for the coming of your Spirit.
Lord, for today's world,
we pray for the coming of your Spirit.
Lord, for our world and our lives,
we pray for the coming of your Spirit.
Amen.

The Lord's Prayer:

Our Father ...

Singing the Faith 345

And can it be that I should gain

An interest in the Saviour's blood?
Died he for me, who caused his pain?
For me, who him to death pursued?
Amazing love! How can it be
That thou, my God, shouldst die for me?

'Tis mystery all : the Immortal dies!
Who can explore his strange design?
In vain the first-born seraph tries
To sound the depths of love divine.
'Tis mercy all! Let earth adore,
Let angel minds enquire no more.

He left his Father's throne above -
So free, so infinite his grace -
Emptied himself of all but love,
And bled for Adam's helpless race.
'Tis mercy all, immense and free;
For, O my God, it found out me!

Long my imprisoned spirit lay
Fast bound in sin and nature's night;
Thine eye diffused a quickening ray -
I woke, the dungeon flamed with light,
My chains fell off, my heart was free,
I rose, went forth, and followed thee.

No condemnation now I dread;
Jesus, and all in him, is mine!
Alive in him, my living head,
And clothed in righteousness divine,
Bold I approach the eternal throne,-And
claim the crown, through Christ, my own.

Charles Wesley (1707-1788)

Benediction & Blessing

Holy Spirit, send us out.
Gentle Spirit, calm our fears.
Spirit of truth, lead us to a broader vision
of your work. Spirit of strength, in our
weaknesses, make us strong.
Spirit of power, show us when and how
to act for you. Holy Spirit, send us out.
Amen.