

Haverhill Methodist Church – Worship at Home

Sunday 23rd May 2021

Day of Pentecost

Welcome Message – Revd. Peter Goodhall

After obediently waiting in Jerusalem, the believers were filled with the Holy Spirit. In our time of waiting, let us open our hearts to the coming of the Holy Spirit to us today as heart-warming flame, peace-bringing dove and life-giving water.

Opening Prayer

Out of my bondage, sorrow, and night,
Jesus, I come: Jesus, I come;
Into your freedom, gladness, and light,
Jesus, I come to You.

Out of my sickness into Your health,
Out of my want and into Your wealth,
Out of my sin and into Yourself,
Jesus, I come to You.

Out of my shameful failure and loss,
Jesus, I come: Jesus, I come;
Into the glorious gain of Your cross,
Jesus, I come to You.
Out of earth's sorrows into Your balm,
Out of life's storms and into Your calm,
Out of distress to jubilant psalm,
Jesus, I come to You.

Out of unrest and arrogant pride,
Jesus, I come: Jesus, I come;
Into Your blessed will to abide,
Jesus, I come to You.
Out of myself to dwell in Your love,
Out of despair into joy from above,
Upward for ever on wings like a dove,
Jesus, I come to You.

Out of the fear and dread of the tomb,
Jesus, I come: Jesus, I come;
Into the joy and light of Your home,
Jesus, I come to You.

Out of the depths of ruin untold,
Into the peace of Your sheltering fold,
Ever Your glorious face to behold,
Jesus, I come to You.

Out of the lockdown that kept me inside,
Jesus, I come: Jesus, I come;
Into the house of my Shepherd and Guide,
Jesus, I come to You.

Out of the silence and out of my home,
Out of the ache of being alone,
Into the fellowship of all round your throne,
Jesus, I come to You.

William Sleeper (1840-1920)

Last verse Peter Goodhall 18th May 2021

Hymn/song

Bible Readings

Ezekiel chapter 37 verses 1-14

Acts chapter 2 verses 1-21

Prayer

Holy Spirit, come.
Come and be my friend.
Be the friend at my side,
My counsel and my guide.
Be the friend I can ask
To help me in every task.
Be the friend I can trust
To advise me what is just.
Be the friend who shares
All my worries and cares.

Be the friend to confirm
And help me stand firm.
Be the friend whose friendship nothing will sever.
Be the friend whose friendship lasts forever. Holy Spirit, come.
Come and be my friend. **Amen.**

Hymn/song

Sermon

Ezekiel 37:12 God said to his people 'I will bring you back'
Acts 2:17 'In the last days God says 'I will pour out my spirit on all people'.

On this day of Pentecost we celebrate these two great promises of God.

Let us consider them in turn and let them speak to our lives and our experience.

Firstly, Ezekiel 37:12

God said to his people 'I will bring you back'

Ezekiel went with the first batch of prisoners of war to exile in Babylon in 597 BC.

In a prophetic vision he surveys the broken bones of his nation and promises that God will eventually bring his chosen people home again.

Here today we experience a homecoming, a family reunion.

Sadly not our entire church family – we still long for that day - but look around you today and rejoice in being together with your sisters and brothers in Christ.

God said to his people 'I will bring you back'.

A family gathering like this is how it should be at Pentecost, the birthday of the church.

When the day of Pentecost came all the believers were together in one place.

With Ezekiel we have been in a kind of exile this past year.

Lockdown cut us off and shut us off.

The virus held us prisoner – even if it was house arrest!

With Ezekiel we survey the valley of death and devastation

Coronavirus has left behind.

The valley of dry bones is a powerful picture.

The Lord said to Ezekiel "These bones are the whole house of Israel". They say, "Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost; we are cut off completely."

I had days when I felt like that this past winter, and I know I am not alone. Perhaps you did too.

What happened to the green pastures?

The valley of dry bones is a picture of physical death and destruction, of defeat, of despair.

In historical terms, this valley of dry bones could be the Somme, the holocaust, the killing fields of Cambodia or the funeral pyres of India today.

In symbolic terms, this valley of dry bones reflects our human experience.

Maybe you've seen in your life what Ezekiel saw and felt what he must have felt.

When you have walked in the valley of the shadow of death.

When life has been a battlefield and you've been under fire from the enemy.

Here are feelings of despair, defeat, dryness, hope in ruins, and left only with reminders of a past.

Maybe you've been there.

Maybe you are in that place today.

When you feel drained and running on an empty tank.

Maybe in regret or pity you've picked over the bones of the past.

Yet, maybe like Ezekiel, who felt God's guiding hand, God has led you through the experience.

You are coming through the other side. You are more hopeful.

The hand and the Spirit of the Lord sometimes leads you to and through such valleys, places where beauty and life are absent, and yet the hand and the Spirit of the Lord are undeniably and mysteriously present with you.

God said to his people 'I will bring you back'.

God the life-giver speaks words of life, words of resurrection over his people.

This scene of death was transformed into a place of life.

Ezekiel prophesied over the bones and the breath of God's Holy Spirit brought them back to life, back from the dead.

The bones came together and the dismembered were remembered! And that's an interesting take on the word 're-membered'.

The dead bones are not forgotten about, cast aside, but are seen as the 'building blocks' of a new creation.

They are re-membered, in both senses of the word.

It tells us that in God's work of restoration, God takes your dryness, your deadness, your hurts, the battle wounds of your past, all within that severs and dismembers your humanity and all that would sever you from God; God takes all that, and doesn't cast it aside but these experiences are the 'building blocks' of a new creation within you.

You are remembered, restored and renewed.

God said to his people 'I will bring you back'.

And God was true to his word.

Together today, together again we stand firm on his promise.

God is bringing his people back.

But what for?

And what next?

What next for the church?

What next for this church?

Acts 2:17

'In the last days God says 'I will pour out my spirit on all people'.

After his resurrection, just before his return into heaven Jesus told his followers:

'Stay in the city of Jerusalem until you have been clothed with power from on high'. (Luke 24:49)

But ask yourself 'What if they had not stayed put?

What if in their enthusiasm they said to one another, 'it looks like it is now all up to us, let us leave this city now, go to the nations as his witnesses to preach the gospel of repentance and forgiveness'?

What if they had left Jerusalem and missed the gift of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost?

The Acts of the Apostles would be more of a leaflet than a book!

Do you think the disciples would have accomplished anything without the Holy Spirit?

No. Will we? No.

Thankfully the first disciples did not get ahead of themselves. In obedience to their Lord they waited until the Day of Pentecost when they were clothed with power from on high.

Friends, there is a great temptation for us as the brakes of lockdown ease and we look to the future that we take off in our own strength and power, that we feel it is all up to us, that we set off along a path of our own choosing, that we set the agenda, that we look busy, that we go backwards not forwards, that we neglect what the Spirit is saying to Haverhill Methodist church, that we choose again the rut the pandemic jolted us out of.

Mark Twain wrote:

'The only difference between a rut and a grave is the length and the depth'.

God has opened our graves and has led out, led us back to the land of the living.

In the last days God says 'I will pour out my spirit on all people'.

I believe now is the time for us to receive the Holy Spirit.

I believe now is the time for us to be guided by the Holy Spirit.

Now is the time for us to depend on the Holy Spirit.

Now is the season for us to wait on the Holy Spirit.

This is a time to dream dreams, to see visions, to prophesy.

Now is the time for us to rest in the Holy Spirit.

Lockdown has left many of us physically, mentally, spiritually tired.

If we are honest, we might not have the energy or the vision to move forward.

And I say to you and to myself it is ok to feel that, to acknowledge that today.

Albert Simpson, who founded of the Christian and Missionary Alliance, said of the disciples between Ascension and Pentecost "Those waiting days were necessary to enable the disciples to realize their need, their nothingness, their failure and their dependence upon the Master.

They had to get emptied first before they would get filled."

Is that true for you today?

Are you running on empty?

Is there something still you need emptying of, to set aside, some sin, or resentment?

The emptier we are, the more of the Holy Spirit can be poured into our lives.

Let us not get ahead of the Holy Spirit; let us not lock the dove in her cage.

But instead pray 'breathe on me breath of God'.

For it is not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the Lord of hosts. (Zechariah 4:6)

Now is the time for us to be filled with the Holy Spirit.

How? We just ask. No churchy ritual. No clever formula.

Just pray 'Come Holy Spirit into my life, fill me afresh, give me new vision for living, fan the flame of my faith and confirm me as your witness'.

So let us today rededicate ourselves and our church to God.

Today we abandon ourselves to His future.

On this day of Pentecost we celebrate these two great promises of God:

Ezekiel 37:12

God said to his people 'I will bring you back'

Acts 2:17

In the last days God says 'I will pour out my spirit on all people'.

To God be all praise and glory. Amen.

Hymn/song

Prayers for Others

God of wind and dove and fire,

Speak freedom, peace and change

over lands divided by war, disease and by creed...

Speak refreshment, assurance and warmth

over lives afflicted by exhaustion and illness...

over carers risking their health and safety for others...

Speak integrity, humility and challenge

over churches crippled by fear and a loss of place...

Speak calm, gentleness and comfort

over lives broken by grief and loss...

Speak power, anointing and healing over each one of us,
that this Pentecost may be a new beginning, and a catalyst for
change.

Release in us your gifts and help us to bear fruit that lasts.

May your living waters bubble up and flow from our hearts to others.

Through Jesus Christ our risen and ascended Lord. Amen.

Unite your prayers with the whole church as you pray The Lord's
Prayer. 'Our Father...'

Hymn/song

The Blessing

We offer our lives and our gifts to the Lord.

A Prayer of St. Augustine:

Breathe in me, O Holy Spirit, that my thoughts may all be holy.

Act in me, O Holy Spirit, that my work, too, may be holy.

Draw my heart, O Holy Spirit, that I love but what is holy.

Strengthen me, O Holy Spirit, to defend all that is holy.

Guard me, then, O Holy Spirit, that I always may be holy. **Amen.**

May the Blessing of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit be upon you and remain with you all at Pentecost and forevermore. **Amen.**

Coffee Time Conversation

- Flame of fire, living water, dove of peace?
Which symbol of the Holy Spirit speaks to you today?
- What 'dry bones' might live again?
- Where do you see the Holy Spirit moving today?

Suggested Hymns and Songs

More Traditional Music:

Come down, O love divine
O Thou who camest from above
Breathe on me breath of God

More Contemporary Music:

Colours of Day
Holy Spirit we welcome you
Let our praise be your welcome

Keep socially distancing.

Keep safe.

Keep communicating.

Keep celebrating the Resurrection of our Lord and the coming of the Holy Spirit.

God bless you and keep you until we meet again.

My prayers are with you.

With love,

Peter