

Creationist 2.0

Creating is Spirit Led

28 May 2023

Call to Worship – Psalm 104

O LORD, how manifold are your works!

**In wisdom you have made them all;
the earth is full of your creatures.**

Yonder is the sea, great and wide,

**creeping things innumerable are there,
living things both small and great.**

When you hide your face, they are dismayed;

**when you take away their breath, they die
and return to their dust.**

When you send forth your spirit, they are created;

and you renew the face of the ground.

May the glory of the LORD endure forever;

may the LORD rejoice in his works—

I will sing to the LORD as long as I live;

I will sing praise to my God while I have being.

Breathe on me breath of God

Edwin Hatch

Breathe on me, Breath of God,

fill me with life anew,

that I may love the way you love,

and do what you would do.

Breathe on me, Breath of God,

until my heart is pure,

until my will is one with yours,

to do and to endure.

Breathe on me, Breath of God,

so shall I never die,

but live with you the perfect life

for all eternity.

Prayer of Adoration and Confession

Summer gives way to Autumn

Autumn gives way to Winter

Leaves dropping from trees

A colourful carpet

Fading to an unkempt brown

Nourishment for the earth

Water rests in pools

Shaded with silt

Longing for the weakening sun

To free it from its earthbound prison

Birds seek shelter

Hidden holes and nests

Keeping cold and damp at bay

The rhythm of life slows

Drawing breath

Roots deepening

Sap thickening

Preparation made

For when Winter gives way to Spring

God, thank you for the rhythm of the seasons

For the tints and the shades

The brights and the pastels

Thank you for the constant beauty that surrounds us

Throughout the year

Forgive us for those times when we see only the effect it has on us. No sense of all that is happening around us, depending on the breathing in and out of this world of ours. Teach us to be more conscious of your work in the world.

We bring our private confessions before God...

We are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation,

God's own people, in order that we may proclaim the mighty acts of God who called we out of darkness into marvellous light.

Once we were not a people, but now we are God's people; once we had not received mercy, but now we have received mercy.

The Peace

Reading

Acts 2:1-13

When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place.

² And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. ³ Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. ⁴ All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.

⁵ Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. ⁶ And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each.

⁷ Amazed and astonished, they asked, "Are not all these who are speaking Galileans?" ⁸ And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language?

⁹ Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, ¹⁰ Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, ¹¹ Cretans and Arabs—in our own languages we hear them speaking about God's deeds of power." ¹² All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, "What does this mean?" ¹³ But others sneered and said, "They are filled with new wine."

Reflection

Have you ever noticed how there are some topics people get all hot and bothered about? There's a saying that one should never talk about sex, religion or politics in polite company. That's generally because these are topics that get people upset, flustered and often angry. I had a friend who I learnt not to talk politics with because he would get furiously angry when I questioned some of his assumptions and beliefs around his chosen political party. It wasn't that I was trying to get him angry, he was simply very sensitive to being challenged about how he thought. And talking about sex in a church environment, unless it is to say that all sex outside of marriage will send you to hell while completely ignoring how people actually live and behave. Well, need I say more.

Of course, in the church we have our own hoodoos and don't-talk-about-its. Music is a great way to start an argument. And I think I can count on one hand the number of sermons I've heard about money that don't belabour how much you should put in the offering plate. Then there is the Holy Spirit. Sometimes I

wonder if we think about the Holy Spirit a little like children who are to be seen but not heard. And we can do without the seeing too, thank you very much. The Holy Spirit can be a very divisive subject. There are those who fit right on in with the Holy Rollers and candelabra swingers and there are those who are firmly in the don't-talk-about-it camp. Along the way the conversation has become so fraught on occasion that we often find ourselves avoiding it. Yes, we refer to the Holy Spirit – we will celebrate Trinity Sunday next week and it's not much of a Trinity if the Holy Spirit is missing. And don't forget that today is Pentecost Sunday, a celebration of the coming of the Holy Spirit on the disciples. But outside of the calendar celebrations and the occasional nod via a prayer or song, the Holy Spirit is often missing in action.

I think part of that comes down to fear. The idea of the Holy Spirit is mysterious, not helped by the historically common term, the Holy Ghost. We think of things that go bump in the night and strange, inexplicable events that take us out of our comfort zone. All of which is rather ironic given we worship a God we cannot see and who's Son mysteriously rose from the dead and then ascended into heaven. The entire focus of our religious practice is on three persons who are somehow one person, none of whom we can see and all of whom have the ability to insert themselves into our lives in answer to prayer, or independently of our prayer. Which begs the question, why are we only fearful of the Holy Spirit?

Part of it probably comes from stories like the one we have read this morning. Here is a group of apparently normal people sitting together in a public space. All of sudden tongues of fire appear on their heads and they begin speaking in other languages. We read this and immediately begin to wonder. What if that happened to me? What would it look like? What would other people think? What if something went wrong? What if I didn't like it? What if others didn't like it? Would I still be in control? All these questions build up in us and we can find ourselves fearfully avoiding getting into a situation where they might apply to us.

You know what? I get it. Being out of control can be a horrible feeling. It's bad enough when we are doing something like bungee jumping or parachuting where the theory is that there is something that will at least break our fall. But those times in our lives when things go wrong and there is nothing we can do about it are not times we want to visit if we can possibly avoid it. When we invite Christ into our lives there is a sense of having at least a modicum of

control – after all, we are doing the inviting. But the Holy Spirit? That’s a whole other level.

And another thing. Look at all those stunts people seem to get up to when they are under the influence of the Holy Spirit. Some of them seem OK... teachers and healers, but prophets and miracle workers, that’s not even real, is it? And what about that falling over, ‘in the Spirit,’ or ecstatic trances, or legs getting longer. And just like humans have done since Adam we turn things into something they’re not.

To be fair, let’s not forget about the holy rollers either. Paul wrote to the Corinthians telling them to settle down and remember that no matter what they thought was OK, they had to keep in mind those around them who struggled with some of the things they got up to. Either way we have a duty of care to those around us. To those who are afraid or unsure we extend grace. To those who are excited and full on we extend grace. And to the Holy Spirit we extend an invitation to lead us into that grace, to guide us, to comfort us and to pray for us when we run out of words. More in a moment. Let’s sing first.

Come, Holy Spirit

Steve Kuban

Come Holy Spirit

Fall afresh on me

Fill me with Your power

Satisfy my needs

Only You can make me whole

Give me strength to make me grow

Come Holy Spirit

Fall afresh on me

Holy Spirit rain down

Hillsong Worship

Holy Spirit, rain down, rain down

Oh Comforter and Friend

How we need Your touch again

Holy Spirit, rain down, rain down

Let Your power fall

Let Your voice be heard

Come and change our hearts

As we stand on Your word

Holy Spirit, rain down

No eye has seen, no ear has heard

No mind can know what God has in store

So open up heaven, open it wide

Over Your church and over our lives

Reading John 20:19-23

¹⁹ When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." ²⁰ After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. ²¹ Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." ²² When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. ²³ If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."

Reflection

I have spent some time looking at some of the ideas and ways of acting that can lead us to treat the Holy Spirit in extreme ways. In one sense it is a little like we treat celebrities or even politicians. Some people fawn over their every word and action while others won't give them the time of day. What we tend to forget when we treat people this way is that they are just that, people. Sure, they might have written a song we like or acted in a movie or made a political point, but at the end of the day they are human beings. They eat and sleep just like we do. They feel happy and joyful and sad and afraid and lonely just like we do. The gloss of celebrity might hide that from us, but it is no less there.

The Holy Spirit is a person. Just like Jesus was/is a person. Just like God the Father is a person. Just like you or I are persons. That matters. It matters

because it needs to inform us about how we treat the Holy Spirit. Do we speak to the Spirit as a person? Do we speak about the Spirit as a person? To be fair, it's a little more difficult than with Jesus or God the Father. We have no point of reference to think about the Spirit from a personal perspective. There are no stories of the Spirit appearing in bodily form to give us some shape to our understanding. I guess it's why the term Ghost is sometimes used. By the same token the names and roles given to the Holy Spirit in the Bible all point to a personal aspect. Comforter, Counsellor, Guide, Intercessor, Teacher, Witness, all infer there is a person involved.

Where this becomes important is when we find ourselves in a situation where we are unsure how to behave. For example, imagine you are in a church service, and someone begins speaking out in tongues. I know for sure that some of you would think it is wonderful and I am equally sure that some would find it incredibly uncomfortable. What do we do here? How do we behave? For the most part we will, without thinking take the path of greatest comfort. It's not about whether God is involved here, but how we feel about the circumstance. But what if we take a different approach? What if, instead of reacting to the situation we pause and listen for the person of the Holy Spirit? It is possible that the speaker in tongues is speaking out of turn. How do we know that if we don't listen for the Spirit. It is possible that the speaker is responding to a prompting of the Spirit. How do we know that if we don't listen for the Spirit. Listening, not for some ethereal, ghostly figure, but for the person we name as the Holy Spirit.

There is no doubt that this induces fear and doubt and discomfort. What if I'm wrong? What if I can't hear anything? The, 'What ifs...' will likely go on into the sunset. I want to suggest a final, 'What if?' What if the Holy Spirit is speaking to me and I use all my excuses to avoid hearing?

I want you to listen to the reading again. As you listen, find yourself locked away in the room with the disciples. Jesus appears among you. Breathes on you. Says to you, 'Receive the Holy Spirit.' Listen.

¹⁹ When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." ²⁰ After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. ²¹ Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." ²² When he had said this, he

breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit. ²³ If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.”

What do you hear? What do you see? How will you respond?

I want to close with a final idea. As Genesis 1 begins we see the Spirit of God brooding over the waters. Then God says let there light. Suddenly the sense of brooding is gone, creation springs into being to be crowned with the glory of the first human beings, man and woman. And God says, ‘Let us make humankind IN OUR IMAGE. That’s not just the image of the Father and of the Son. It is also the image of the Spirit. We are made in the image of the Holy Spirit just as much as we are made in the image of the Father and the Son. Think about that for a moment. That’s huge! You and I are made in the image of God, Father, Son, AND Holy Spirit. Created to be creators is not a small thing.

We Pray

Holy Spirit, as we worship before you today, we are sorry for the ways in which we have treated you as a thing or an object rather than a real person. We don’t have easy ways to talk about you, so we avoid instead of meeting you. Teacher and Guide, help us to treat you not as an uncomfortable extra or a crazy outlier but as person who has feelings and interests and skills and who loves us in concert with the Father and the Son. Create in us a sense of community with you that reflects the community you have within yourselves. Strengthen us to be a people who respond to your promptings with grace and wisdom. Through you, our intercessor and revealer of truth we pray. Amen.

Take me into the holy of holies

David Browning

Take me past the outer courts,
Into the holy place,
Past the brazen altar.
Lord I want to see Your face.
Pass me by the crowds of people
And the priests who sing Your praise.
I hunger and thirst for Your righteousness,
But it's only found one place.

Take me in to the holy of holies.
Take me in by the blood of the lamb.
Take me in to the holy of holies.
Take the coal, touch my lips, here I am.

Offering

<https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/worship-planning>

God of wind and flame: set us on fire this morning as we celebrate the bursting of your Holy Spirit into the world on the Day of Pentecost! Remind us that the gift you gave that day was not just the gift to speak in different tongues, but also the gift of hearing and comprehension. May your Holy Spirit keep us attuned to the voices all around us, to those who need us to be bearers of your love and compassion, and may these gifts we give help us, through your church, meet those needs. In the holy name of Jesus we pray. Amen.

Prayer for Others and Ourselves – Noel Read

All these things we pray through Jesus, our Lord, who taught us to pray...

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father in heaven, holy be your name
Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.
Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours, now and forever.
Amen

Will you come and follow me

Graham Maule, John I. Bell

Will you come and follow me
If I but call your name?
Will you go where you don't know
And never be the same?
Will you let my love be shown,
Will you let my name be known,
Will you let my life be grown
In you and you in me?

Will you leave yourself behind
If I but call your name?
Will you care for cruel and kind
And never be the same?
Will you risk the hostile stare
Should your life attract or scare?
Will you let me answer prayer
In you and you in me?

Will you love the 'you' you hide
If I but call your name?
Will you quell the fear inside
And never be the same?
Will you use the faith you've found
To reshape the world around,
Through my sight and touch and sound
In you and you in me?

Lord, your summons echoes true
When you but call my name.
Let me turn and follow you
And never be the same.
In your company I'll go
Where your love and footsteps show.
Thus I'll move and live and grow
In you and you in me.

[Benediction and Grace](#)

As we go may we be transformed and transforming into people of the Spirit,
led by our Guide into all truth...

May the Grace of the Lord Jesus Christ,
the Love of God,
and the Fellowship of the Holy Spirit
be with us all, now and forevermore. Amen.

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