



Yorkshire North & East Methodist District

PASTORAL LETTER FROM THE DISTRICT CHAIR, THE REVD LESLIE NEWTON

June 2020

Dear friends,

There's a tradition in many parts of the country, certainly in times past, for Pentecost to be celebrated by local churches sharing in "Whit Walks." These walks are a witness and celebration of God's great gift of the Spirit. The contrast of the Whit Walks with Pentecost celebrations this year couldn't be starker. We could not physically gather together in our churches never mind go onto the streets *en masse*.

However, I hope that you were able to share in some time of reflection and worship over Pentecost, either watching on television or YouTube, participating via Zoom, or using written worship resources. It's so important to be reminded of the dramatic coming of the Holy Spirit, described in Acts 2, just as Jesus had promised. The Spirit drives the early group of Jesus' followers out into the streets from the house where they had been gathered. Their anxiety about the future was transformed into an irrepressible courage and passion. Immediately they are enabled to share the Good News of Jesus Christ in all the varied languages of the crowds gathered in Jerusalem at that time.

And let us remind ourselves of the heart of that Good News.

Firstly, the timeless treasure that we – and the world - can be saved from ourselves and our failures. We are offered the heart-warming assurance that we are all personally loved by God with a perfect love that will not let us go. By God's grace we are granted forgiveness for the past, strength for today and hope for tomorrow. This continues to be matchless Good News for every human soul it reaches.

Secondly, we are offered a revolutionary and life-giving energy for radical transformation. In Luke chapter 4 we read of the Spirit being upon Jesus as he declared what is sometimes called his 'manifesto.' As 'God with us' Jesus quotes Isaiah and makes plain God's priorities and heart: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners, and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour." He then astounds his audience by declaring, "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing." This amazing vision is now being fulfilled personally in Jesus and all that he is about.

Acts 2:1-12

When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. 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. Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.

Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each. Amazed and astonished, they asked, "Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language? Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabs—in our own languages we hear them speaking about God's deeds of power." All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, "What does this mean?"

Two thousand years on, God's Spirit continues to be poured out upon the Church every day to express and live out precisely that same Good News. She continues to stir acts of compassion and care, creativity and imagination, prophecy and courage, justice and liberation.

This Spirit-led sharing of Good News is needed just as much as ever. Indeed, perhaps we sense an even greater urgency today. The impact of Covid-19 and the measures to limit its spread continue to cast a long shadow over our homes, the economy, wider society and much of our globe. As others have noted, we're all in the same Covid-19 storm but in very different boats. Many are struggling in boats that are barely sea-worthy, never mind storm-proof.

But it's not just Covid-19 that is infecting and affecting our world. In these last few days we have also been reminded so painfully and powerfully of the infection of racism. I urge you to join with me in a commitment to recognise more fully the discriminatory and life-limiting effects of the systemic bias that causes racial inequality, including the unconscious bias of individuals, as well as harnessing into protest and action our anger about the continuing impact of conscious bias.

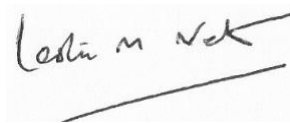
As we recognise these challenges and many others, please join with me in that ancient prayer: "Come, Holy Spirit." Come, Spirit, and help us to be – and to share - the Good News of Jesus more passionately and more sacrificially than ever – today!

Although we're acutely aware that we are far from perfect, around our District Good News stories abound of people bringing life and hope to the poor, imprisoned, blind and oppressed: in the provision of foodbanks and household support for the vulnerable; in support for the homeless and those in debt; in mental health care and counselling; in the support for young people, families and the elderly; in the campaigning for justice nationally and globally; in the speaking of truth to power about poverty; in the commitment to act against climate change; in the consistent offering of our hope in Christ.

I thank God – and all of you, wonderful Methodist people - that together we continue to be God's Spirit-led Church. Our prayers, action, faith, love and hope - interwoven as they very often are with our questions, impatience, frustration and aching - are all helping to shape how we share this Good News.

So, let us continue to seek more of God's Spirit in our lives and in our Churches so that we can authentically echo Jesus' declaration: "Today this scripture is being fulfilled in your hearing."

Every blessing



*Holy Spirit, gift bestower
breathe into our hearts today,
Flowing water, dove that hovers,
Holy Spirit, guide our way.
Love inspirer, joy releaser,
Spirit, take our fears away.
Reconciler, peace restorer,
move among us as we pray.*

*Holy Spirit, Christ proclaimer,
wisdom bringer, light our way.
Fire that dances, wind that whispers,
Holy Spirit, come today.
Ease disturber, comfort bearer
Move among us while we pray.
Truth revealer, faith confirmer,
Rest within our hearts today.*

*Singing the Faith 383,
From Church Hymnary*

Please know of the ongoing care, prayers and support of ministers and lay leaders around our District. If you're struggling to find the support you need, please contact the District Office at admin@yorkshirenemethodist.org or on 07809 431871
