

## **Pentecost**

**John 20.19-23**

**Acts 2.1-21**

**Psalm 104.26-36**

(Box, seeds)

The seeds that were planted on Good Friday - our hopes and dreams.. are sprouting, green and fresh, the fruit of our prayers and God's love.. look at them

And the box we sat with during Lent? It's reappeared. I wonder what it will reveal?

It seems, at Pentecost, God is outside the box, on the loose', uncontainable.

On that first Pentecost, 50 days after the Passover, after Easter, the disciples are all together in one place – things are changing.

They've just chosen a replacement for Judas.

The waiting, the fear, the uncertainty has vanished spectacularly for now, and they experience something indescribable ....power, clarity, an outpouring of spirit, boldness, ability to speak and be heard, and understood by people from all the known world – a reversal of Babel.

God is on the loose in these figures with feet of clay. But what **is** in the box? (**Open the box.**)

The box is empty because God is out there... past and present come together..

But is the box really empty?

The box is empty ... or is it?

Do we dismiss it too quickly in our rushing busy world? Perhaps we need to spend some time with this box, and wonder ...

What is there that we cannot see?

A man whispered, "God speak to me!" and a Kookaburra laughed.  
But the man didn't hear.  
So the man called out, "God speak to me!" and thunder rolled  
across the sky. But the man didn't listen.  
The man looked around and said, "God, let me see you!" and a star  
shone brightly. But the man didn't see.  
Despairingly, the man said, "God show me a miracle", and a life  
was born. But the man didn't notice  
Desperate now, the man said, "Love me, God", and his wife smiled  
at him, but that was so normal, he missed it.  
Feeling completely alone, he whispered to the heavens, "Touch me  
God and let me know you are here!" God reached out and touched  
the man. But the man brushed the butterfly away and went sadly on  
his way.

Maybe God is in this place, in our lives but we never noticed ...

What do you know of Spirit, Holy Spirit?  
who moved on the waters at creation  
who was with the Prophets in their speaking  
with Jesus in his conception and birth (Luke 1:35)  
his baptism (Mark 1:9-11)  
his ministry work, (Matthew 12:18)  
miracles, (Matthew 12:22-28)  
preaching (Luke 4:18-21)  
and temptations (Mark 1:12) ...  
and is sent by Jesus to his place (John 16:7-9, 2-22, Acts 1:5,8) ...

Holy Spirit, the advocate, the speaker of truth, the go-between with  
God, manifest in breath, wind, fire, stillness.

What do you know of spirit, Holy Spirit?  
Poured out on all people,  
Breaking down barriers of prejudice and discrimination.

'Watch out! God is on the loose. God is out of the box!  
Haven't we human beings always tried to keep God in a box, under  
our control? We've tried to keep God in the box of religion. We have

allowed ourselves to be persuaded that God can be subjected to rules and regulation and religious practices, can be under the control of religious hierarchies, church committees, human systems. Do this, and God will be pleased with you; do that, and we can assure you that you will fall under God's severe displeasure. Isn't that the way, very often, that religious bodies imagine they control God?

But believe in resurrection [believe in Pentecost] and God is free, free from all religious systems, free to use religion to meet us on God's terms. As Jesus told us, 'The wind blows wherever it wishes; you hear the sounds it makes, but you do not know where it comes from or where it is going. It is like that with everyone who is born of spirit.' (Good News Bible)

So perhaps there is reason to be a little afraid, as we look at the empty tomb [the empty box]: To be afraid that our attempts to control God through religion are doomed; to be afraid that our cherished traditions are, in fact, not the last word, for God has had the last word – or rather we should maybe say the last laugh of God's life as God broke free from every bond on that first Easter Day. God is on the loose! Tremble then, all who think they have God tied down with religion.

And if God is free – if Christ is risen – then there can in fact, be no forcing of God in to any human box at all. Not only can we no longer think that God is a Protestant or a Catholic, or white, black or brown; no longer think that god is more like us nice middle class folk; no longer imagine God prefers Christians to Muslims or vice versa. Now we can no longer allow any ideology or nation to hijack God. God is not on 'our' side any more than God is on 'their' side. So tremble, you statesmen and women who imagine you can co-opt God onto your side or into your army or into your ideological box. God can never again be tied down by any of our political systems, however wonderful we may imagine them to be. God is on the loose. [Here is a hint of what Spirit is, what Holy Spirit looks like. ...]

And I suspect – indeed I am increasingly convinced – that to truly celebrate the resurrection, to truly welcome God on the loose, we need to be constantly willing to hand over control to God. All must be constantly handed over, laid down, given up, and we must allow

God to be God: crucified and risen and on the loose in our world, out of control.

I like the thrill of imagining the unimaginable: the One who made the sun, the moon and the stars bursting out not just from the tomb, but from every box into which we try to put him, and striding free and majestic and totally out of our control, into all our lives; inviting, challenging, summoning us to be free – like him!<sup>1</sup>

So here we are today, enfolded in the chaos, the empowerment of Pentecost, here we are, all together in this place, free! Look around you...

Holy Spirit gifts us each with different gifts..

Look at the sheet. These are some of the ways you might express your gifts, your freedom, Spirit in your lives, for the building up of this community and beyond.

Sit a while. look, noticing what attracts you, where are you being drawn? Maybe what is calling you is not written there ...

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Breathe in the breath of life

Fire of the spirit

Allow yourself to be enlivened, encouraged, enfolded by love ...

How do we share the gift of Spirit this Pentecost?

When I arrived, i told you my pomegranate story, a story of call, and of gift, a story of community, a story of fecundity.. that story is growing each day..coming alive here in Sale..

Susanna

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<sup>1</sup> John Harvey in Eggs and Ashes: Practical & Liturgical Resources for Lent and Holy Week, by Ruth Burgess, Chris Polhill, published by Wild Goose Publications, Glasgow, 2004 pp233-234