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*Sunday 31st May 2020 – Pentecost*

*Readings: Numbers 11:24-30 & John 20:19-23*

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## **Numbers 11:24-30**

So Moses went out and told the people what the Lord had said. He brought together seventy of their elders and had them stand around the tent. Then the Lord came down in the cloud and spoke with him, and he took some of the power of the Spirit that was on him and put it on the seventy elders. When the Spirit rested on them, they prophesied—but did not do so again.

However, two men, whose names were Eldad and Medad, had remained in the camp. They were listed among the elders, but did not go out to the tent. Yet the Spirit also rested on them, and they prophesied in the camp. A young man ran and told Moses, “Eldad and Medad are prophesying in the camp.”

Joshua son of Nun, who had been Moses’ aide since youth, spoke up and said, “Moses, my lord, stop them!”

But Moses replied, “Are you jealous for my sake? I wish that all the Lord’s people were prophets and that the Lord would put his Spirit on them!” Then Moses and the elders of Israel returned to the camp.

## **John 20:19-23**

On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jewish leaders, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you!” After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord.

Again Jesus said, “Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.” And with that he breathed on them and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone’s sins, their sins are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.”

# Reflection

Last Sunday was not a particularly good day for me. In the first place, it was the anniversary of my dad's death, and then whilst the morning service was streaming, mum had a relapse of her heart condition, and I got to her just as the paramedics were preparing to put her in the back of the ambulance. Naturally, because of the current pandemic, I was not able to accompany her, but they advised that I call after 2-3 hours to get an update. As you might imagine, that was quite an anxious time, but I dialled the hospital number at 3.03pm, and as I waited to be put through, my phone pinged at 3.04pm to say someone had left a message. After speaking to the doctor, I checked the message to find it was one of my small group, who knew nothing of what had happened, sending me the video of the UK Blessing! What a timely reminder that God, through His Holy Spirit is with us and for us in all the circumstances we face! One of the names given to the Holy Spirit is the Comforter, and in that moment, I was acutely aware of being held by God in that situation. The readings for today, Pentecost Sunday, remind us of the gift of the Holy Spirit and what He means for the church. In true Anglican style, I shall look at this with three words beginning with P: power, prophecy and purpose.

Firstly power. In Numbers 11, we read that the Lord 'took some of the power of the Spirit that was on him and put it on the seventy elders.' The Holy Spirit is powerful. In Acts 2, the Spirit descends with 'a sound like the blowing of a violent wind.' We have all witnessed the wholesale destruction that can be caused by tornados. The word used here in the Hebrew is ruach, or pneuma in the Greek. Both words can be translated as wind or breath or Spirit, and it is the same wind that was dynamically present in creation, the same breath that was the source of life, here giving birth to a new creation, the church.

Next, prophecy. As a result of the Spirit resting on the elders, they prophesied. Moses at the end of this passage wishes that all God's people might one day be given the gift of the Spirit, and it is through the prophet Joel that God declares that He will pour out His Spirit on all flesh, sons and daughters, old and young, slave and free. And today we celebrate that since Pentecost, this outpouring of the Holy Spirit is inclusive not exclusive it; is for everyone who calls on the name of the Lord. Spirit-filled believers should not be silent; from the Spirit we receive power to be God's witnesses to those with whom we live.

And finally, purpose. Immediately before He gives the apostles the Holy Spirit, Jesus tells them, 'As the Father has sent me, so I am sending you.' So, joining all these points together, the purpose of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost is to empower us to speak up and witness for Him. Simon Ponsoy in his book 'More', makes the point that the Holy Spirit did not come for our entertainment or excitement, but for empowerment for evangelism. In the current situation in which we find

ourselves, its been noted that people who've never attended church are streaming online services, more people are turning to prayer and Christian publishers are reporting a massive increase in the sales of Bibles. We have a unique opportunity; will we use it to speak boldly? A question to consider as I close. Simon Ponsonby writes: 'Before the church can fill the world, God the Spirit must come and fill her. But in order to fill the church, the Spirit needs to fill us. Samuel Chadwick says, "That which happened at Pentecost is the biggest thing that ever happened. And now the biggest question of all is – has it happened to you and me?"'

Lesley Bell