

St Mary's, Barton-upon-Humber: Readings, prayers and notices for the week May 31- June 7

Collect for the Eighth Sunday of Easter: Pentecost

God, who as at this time taught the hearts of your faithful people by sending to them the light of your Holy Spirit: grant us by the same Spirit to have a right judgement in all things and evermore to rejoice in his holy comfort; through the merits of Christ Jesus our Saviour, who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

or

Holy Spirit, sent by the Father, ignite in us your holy fire;
strengthen your children with the gift of faith,
enliven your Church with the breath of love,
and renew the face of the earth, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Readings: Acts 2.1-21; Psalm 104.25–35, 37; 1 Corinthians 12.3b–13; John 20.19-23

Meditation

I suppose it's understandable that all the pictures, posters and banners for Pentecost show wind (often quite ingeniously), flames and pigeons. They're the images used for the Spirit throughout the Scriptures, both Old and New, and they excite the artistic imagination. Even bits of the language help – we talk about being 'on fire' for some cause or other, or 'inspired' (literally 'breathed into') by something. Pentecost is a dramatic, life-changing episode in the history of the Church as we pray 'Come Holy Ghost, our souls inspire, and lighten with celestial fire...' and hear the Gospel of Jesus giving the Disciples the Holy Spirit (on Easter Day I) by breathing on them in a scene reminiscent – probably intentionally – of God breathing life into the clay-formed Adam in Genesis 2.

It would probably be a bit tricky coming up with a nice painting of the Spirit of Truth.

If we're honest, the fire and the wind and the dove are all a lot more evocative and interesting-sounding than the rather prosaic 'Spirit of Truth.' I think we're missing something, though, if we stick with the easy-to-draw stories of the Spirit without asking what this strange and rather dry-sounding thing 'The Spirit of Truth' amounts to.

There is an OT background: uncomfortably there are references in Kings and Chronicles to 'a lying spirit' sent by God to deceive King Ahab of Israel into doing something disastrous. Those few verses raise all sorts of questions about how those who wrote (and read) those books understood how God engaged with the world. More usual is to find the prophets inspired by the spirit of God to tell (often uncomfortable) truth about a course of action; not simply predictions of the future, but more importantly judgements on the correctness of course of action, or pronouncements of hope in time of darkness. As they used to say, prophecy is less about *foretelling*, more about *forthtelling*, that is, revealing the mind of God.

I reckon that's the way into it. The words of the Spirit are our entry into the mind of God himself.

There's a splendidly ironic bit in John's Gospel. Everyone remembers the passage 'I am the Way, the Truth and the Life,' but it's easy to forget it, or just use it as a nice little one-liner, especially if you're the sort of believer who likes the thought of heaven being filled with clones of ourselves. And especially it's easy to forget it as we enter John's account of Good Friday, the bit where Jesus stands before Pilate. Jesus stands and talks about truth, and Pilate –, perhaps sarcastically, perhaps ironically, comes back with the immortal line, 'What is truth?'

What Pilate's words show is that he has relegated truth to some airy-fairy concept, to be debated over or bent to one's will, a flighty affair for philosophers, not for rulers. Truth is a thing, capable of being manipulated. And as he says this truth is standing before him. Truth is not an idea. In John's Gospel, Truth is a person.

I suppose we're used to 'truth' being opposed to 'lie' or even 'fibbing'. '*Who ate my chocolate? Tell the truth!*' but if you chase it a bit in the language of the Gospels, it's not quite like that – it's opposed to a word meaning ignorant, or concealed, even unreal, illusory. What is going on in the discussion between Pilate and Jesus is to do with what is real and what is illusion.

What on earth has that got to do with Pentecost?

Well, I suppose it's something like this – that being given the Spirit of Truth is about living in that absolute reality which isn't some abstract airy-fairy concept, but God. God *Is*. The Universe exists because God *is*. There's no space for sleight of hand or trickery: the Spirit of Truth cuts through all that isn't absolute and real and brings us to that unimaginable reality which is, again, a person – God himself. To partake of the Spirit of Truth is to partake in the life of the Trinity (see next Sunday for details). All the rest, love, joy, peace, proceed out of the Spirit of Truth because *they flow out of what the God-willed universe is all about*. They aren't arbitrary choices 'now, shall I be loving, or peaceful, or shall I not: they are the very grain of the universe itself, and to oppose them is to oppose everything that is real.

I read an article the other day about how the passion and commitment that people, say, a century ago might have given to religious faith has now shifted – at least in the well-heeled West – to the arena of what we might call political. The environment, human rights, those sort of things. We might spend hours agonising why religion doesn't often seem to meet that need in the West's under 50's, and when it does it often seems very wrapped-up-in-itself rather than world transforming, but there we go.

It struck me, though, that if that passionate commitment is just based on the belief that 'I think *this* way of behaving is better than *that* way' it's actually very fragile. Why should anyone choose to be good? Or just? Or kind? It looks like a straightforward choice between two alternatives, nice or nasty. The fact that most people choose to go with the nice is probably pleasant for the rest of us, but moods can change in the twinkling of an eye. Just look at the crowd's reactions in the trial of Jesus if you doubt that! There's many a philosopher raised the uncomfortable question of whether what we call secular humanist morality is actually trading on the fag-end of the Jewish/Christian tradition, and has much less firm foundations than many like to think.

A Christian's understanding of things like justice or care for the earth, while it might look much the same, is actually founded on something very different: not a carefully weighed up, 'Shall I be St Francis or shall I be Pol Pot?' but that the call to live the life of the Spirit, the Spirit of Truth, is to live life in accordance with the direction of the universe, which is itself an expression of the one absolute reality, God, that Truth which isn't a collection of rules and regulations and tick-boxes but a Person.

We don't try to live lives of love, hope, peacemaking and so on because (we think) they're right. As children of the Spirit of Truth, we try to live that Truth, imperfectly and erratically, because – at the end of it all – that Truth is the only Reality there can ever be. The Reality we call 'God' – and Father.

St Mary's, Barton-upon-Humber: Readings, prayers and notices for the week May 31- June 7

For your prayers

Church: Chaplains in the NHS. That the church may be filled with Holy Spirit. The Anglican Church of Melanesia; The Most Revd Leonard Dawea - Archbishop

World: Health workers, all those involved in keeping essential services running. Our own political leaders. Those charged with peace-keeping and peace-making. The governments & peoples of China, Syria and the Middle East, North Africa. All seeking to resolve the issues surrounding protection of the environment, of infection control and of migrancy.

Our Community: The mission of our parish. Our Deanery. The Church Army & USPG.

Those in need: Those whose lives or livelihoods are endangered by Coronavirus. Those who fear the prospect of isolation. All who live in areas of conflict or tension; the homeless, the poor, the sick, the enslaved, the hungry and the abused. Victims of terrorism.

Those for whom our prayers are asked: Melissa Milbourn, Julie Newton, Penny Archer, Vicky Page-Chestney, Kate Eaton, Mike Page-Chestney, Stephen Wilkinson, Joyce Gibson, Janet Petch, David Witter, Sally, Abby, Jan, Nell.

Departed: David Redrobe, Betty Colwell, Pauline Fields Margaret Hughes, Brian Pearson, . Those who have died as a result of COVID-19 infection, especially those who work in the caring and medical communities.

Next Sunday – Trinity Sunday

Isaiah 40.12–17, 27–31; Psalm 8; 2 Corinthians 13.11–13; Matthew 28.16–20

Updates

Daily Hope phone line

A Church of England initiative, Daily Hope offers music, prayers and reflections as well as full worship services from the Church of England at the end of a telephone line. The line – which is available 24 hours a day on **0800 804 8044** – has been set up particularly with those unable to join online church services during the period of restrictions in mind. It's an 0800 number, so landline calls will usually not cost you anything.

Even the French are opening up places of worship: here we still seem to be in the queue along with pubs and nail bars (so much for the Power of The Established Church :-)) but we're cautiously optimistic that some sort of access to our churches will be permitted before too long. We have done essential marking-off to maintain Social Distancing and the hand sanitiser (no naked lights) is here.

Foodbank is still operating, but unable to take donations in the usual manner. We are accepting cash donations to help run things slightly differently during the present situation.

Do keep in your prayers Janet Petch, who has had to go back into hospital.

Those in need. Please help us keep our intercessions up to date and leave requests for prayer – either by email to david.rowett@lincoln.anglican.org, or the phone, or even a note through my door, and encourage others likewise.

This week...

Martyrdom seems the theme of much of the week: **Justin**, m at Rome in about the year 165 I wrote about in the parish magazine a few weeks ago; his witness to early Christian worship and his staunch defence of the Christian faith contained in his two 'Apologies' and his 'Dialogue with Trypho the Jew' are enormously important sources for our knowledge of the Church in the

second century. However, his feast on the 1st of June is nudged aside by the Visitation of the BVM to Elizabeth, which would normally fall on May 31st. Usually we expect anything involving the BVM to nudge a Sunday into second place, but (a) nudging Pentecost sideways isn't allowed, not even in the highest of high-church circles and (b) the Visitation has always been a slightly more low-key celebration. Interesting, though, since it contains one of our most important Scriptural passages, the Magnificat.

June 2nd commemorates the **Martyrs of Vienne and Lyons, Blandina and her companions**, killed on this day in 177. Particularly interesting here is that the survivors of the persecution wrote an account of what happened: the 90 year old bishop Pothinus was beaten to death, others, including the slave-girl Blandina, formed part of the entertainment at the games. It's also interesting to note that the bodies were burned and the ashes thrown into the river Rhône so that no relics could be kept – a witness that even this early in the Church's life, the remains of those who died for Christ were held to be precious reminders of their faithfulness.

June 3rd (as well as remembering St Kevin of Glendalough) recalls the **Martyrs of Uganda**, both of 1885 and of 1978, a reminder that martyrdom isn't something just for the history books. The names of 46 RC and Anglican martyrs from the 1885 persecution are known; the reasons behind the murders are debated but often linked with the local tradition of 'initiating' young men via the attentions of senior members of the court (let the reader understand). Almost a century later, under Amin and Obote, numbers of Christians were murdered, most memorably Janani Luwum, the Anglican archbishop. The Church of England commemorates Luwum in January, but in Uganda itself all the martyrs, are celebrated on June 3rd.

Boniface of Crediton (June 5) has been described as having had a deeper influence on European history than any other Englishman (which takes some doing). He became a monk at Exeter in about 690, was ordained and refused the safety of England to become a missionary in Frisia, and in 722, now a bishop, went to work in Bavaria. He's remembered best in popular memory for chopping down a sacred oak tree at Geismar and when nothing happened to him as a consequence (eg, struck by lightning, tree falling on him, large foot appearing from the clouds to squash him) the locals decided paganism might not be all it was cracked up to be and conversions followed. Eventually he became bishop of Mainz, baptised king Pepin, and ensured that French monasteries adopted the rule of Benedict (sorry!) because it was more balanced than what they were using before. Eventually he was murdered, a very old man, as he waited to conduct a confirmation.

June 6 (as well as remembering Jarlath of Tuam, who seemed to have used a very non-Benedictine Rule – eg 'The wicked will not rise at your approach. You yourself will be blameworthy if you are gentle with them.') marks the death in 1945 (through natural causes, for once) of **Ini Kopuria**, founder of the Melanesian Brotherhood in 1925. Under his guidance, men would sign up for just 5 years in the religious life (though many stayed much longer). Kopuria believed passionately in the equal dignity of all skin colours, and the Brotherhood rapidly became one of the largest Anglican religious communities. And provided martyrs during the Japanese occupation of the area during WWII....