

Let us pray. Father, on this Pentecost day, we pray that you will come amongst us of all ages and touch our hearts by your Holy Spirit. Amen.

Please be seated. The first thing I noticed when I looked at the reading set for today, the Feast of Pentecost, was that there was a mixed metaphor lurking there. In the reading from Acts, the Holy Spirit is described as looking as of fire. And in the gospel, Jesus says, "The spirit shall flow like rivers of living water."

Now, I'm sure I was drawn to this because I've been a lover of mixed metaphors ever since the former colleague of mine, David, delivered, who was a great preacher, was preaching one day and he got very excited. He was getting to the crescendo of his sermon. He was getting very excited and he said, "and now we come to the heart of the sandwich", gloriously confusing the heart of the matter with the meat of the sandwich.

Ever since then, I've collected mixed metaphors. My favorite is "we'll burn that bridge when we get to it." And then of course, "too many cooks break the camels back". I could go on, but I won't. I should stick to the range of metaphors used to describe the Holy Spirit who is the focus of our attention on this Pentecost Sunday.

The spirit is pictured in scripture as tongues of flame, as in our gospel, living water. There are others. How does the spirit appear at Jesus' baptism? Like a dove. Elsewhere in scripture, the spirit is described as wind or breath. Lots of metaphors and images to describe the Holy Spirit because the Holy Spirit is elusive, mysterious, mystical. And we celebrate the coming of the spirit on the first disciples at the feast of Pentecost, which is 50 days after Easter.

If you were here last week, it was Ascension Day and you'll have heard Jesus' promise to the disciples that once he had returned to heaven after the resurrection and the ascension that he would come back to them, that he would return. He said, "I will not leave you as orphans. I will come to you."

And today we celebrate the fulfillment of that promise, Jesus coming to his disciples in Jerusalem on that first Pentecost by his spirit. And we celebrate

today because God continues to come to his people by his Holy Spirit.

And as I've mentioned, when Jesus talks about his return in the gospel set for today, he talks about the spirit in terms of water. For those of you aren't used to an English accent, let me clarify that what I just said was "waater" because you'll know that's been... if you're regular here, you'll know that's a regular point of confusion in my sermons.

"Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink," Jesus says. "And out of the believers' heart shall flow rivers of living water." And St. Paul in the epistle develops the metaphor. He says, "We are all invited to drink of one spirit." And I want to stay with this image, this metaphor, and just bring out a couple of ways in which this idea of the spirit as living water speaks to me.

Firstly, water provides refreshment. We all need refreshment in our spiritual lives just as our physical bodies need constant refreshment. We talk about people having a thirst for knowledge. So, we as believers are to have a thirst for the knowledge of God and experience of God. Psalm 42 begins like this, "As a deer longs for flowing streams, so my soul longs for you, O God, my soul thirsts for God, for the living God."

Maybe if we're not spiritually thirsty, we won't be led to the living waters of God's Holy Spirit. I think it's a good discipline to pray with the Psalmist: "My soul longs for you, oh God", to express and develop our spiritual thirst. It's a good thing to seek God, to seek His presence, the comfort of His spirit.

John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, was an Anglican clergyman when he taught, when he felt he was losing his faith because his spiritual life was so dry and arid. He didn't feel God's presence with him. Then one Sunday, he found himself in a Bible study when he said his heart was strangely warmed and that experience changed his life.

He found his soul being spiritually refreshed and renewed and it was the work of the Holy Spirit in him, which brought about that refreshment, which was to inspire people throughout the centuries.

Now, of course, we're Episcopalians. We value reason, but that mustn't be to the exclusion of experience. We need God's spirit, that sense of his presence with us, that ongoing refreshment that the spirit brings. A former archbishop of Canterbury wrote this. "Why is it that if a cinema, a comedy produces laughter, the film's regarded as successful? If a theater tragedy brings tears to the audience, the production is regarded as touching? If a football match thrills the spectators, the game is reviewed as exciting? But if the congregation are moved by the glory of God in worship, the audience are accused of emotionalism?" That's a good point.

We mustn't be afraid of emotion, of expressing that sense of God's presence, which actually in my experience comes with tears. The tears are often a sign of God's spirit working in us.

I once had a woman in my last church. She used to come to church, and she started coming and then she suddenly stopped and I saw her in the street and I said, "Why aren't you coming to church? I haven't seen you." She said, "Well, every time I come, I cry." I said, "Well, that's the work of God's spirit touching your heart. That's a sign of God's spirit work in you, that Christians have experienced and felt for centuries."

I regularly have people say to me on the way out after the service, "Oh, thank you for your sermon. I felt it speaking directly to me." Well, that's not because of me or any rhetorical experience or gifts that I have. That's God's spirit speaking to your hearts, bringing the message home, bringing refreshment. We should trust that touch of the spirit and know and name it as such that God's Holy Spirit working in us, refreshing our soul. Let's thirst for more of that.

Another quality of water or any liquid for that matter is that it spreads. When I was a student, I invited all my rugby mates over for dinner and I treated them to my specialty at the time, which was an upside-down pineapple cake. I remember being a bit short of time and rushing and the guys were saying, "Oh, come on. Let's get this cake on the go."

So, I wasn't sure it was fully cooked when I got it out of the oven and I should have put it back in the oven, but I didn't. So, when I flipped the cake over in what

should have been a triumphant final flourish, I lifted up the container and the cake went, which was uncooked, went all over the table, all over everybody's laps. And I'm still reminded of that when we get together 40 odd years later.

The lesson I learned is that a liquid can't be contained. And so it is with the Holy Spirit. Jesus says, "Out of the believer's heart shall flow rivers of living water." The call on us is to be rivers of God's spirit. The spirit flows in; the spirit flows out. We're called to be rivers of God's living water, not reservoirs. We don't hold onto it. We let the spirit flow out of us.

St. Paul says in the book of Romans, "God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us". When the New Testament talks of being filled with the spirit, that's not a one-off event. It's an ongoing process. We're called to be continually filled with God's Holy Spirit, that the spirit flows through us. We're rivers, not reservoirs.

I'm praying that the spirit of God's love flows to those affected by the shooting at the mosque in Clairemont. That was close to home. That was people we know, buildings we know. Imam at that mosque, Imam Taha is a great man. He's been here on a number of occasions. What's flowing out of the hearts of people who take a gun, take it to a place of worship and try and kill as many people as they can? What's flowing out of our hearts?

Pentecost is a day to come to God thirsty, to be filled with His spirit, that rivers of living water may flow out of our hearts. Amen.