Reflection on Pentecost: Mighty Wind and Tongues of Fire, prepared by Fiona

Opening words: This week, we have a transcript. We have attached some pictures/ resources to help you in your meditation. If you are meditating alone but would like to feel 'with us' we meditate at 7.30 pm on Wednesday in our homes during this time of pandemic. The tradition we meditate in is Centring Prayer which is fully inclusive of all traditions of Christian Meditation and welcoming of World Traditions.

Welcome to Christian Meditation in the Centring Prayer Tradition: A very warm welcome from Fiona, Marie, Rob, Hazel and Paul, the leaders of the Christian Meditation group at Wisdom Centre, Romsey. The whole session is about 50 minutes. We meditate, beginning with an opening prayer followed by reflections and then 25 minutes of silence. We hope you enjoy your meditation with us.

Opening Prayer: *Eternal God,* through our meditation, may the ears of our hearts be attentive to your Word. May we seek and find You. Awakened to Your presence, may we be joyful, embodying peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-awareness. May we follow Your teaching, seeking also the Wisdom of the Holy Fathers and Mothers. May we, therefore, commit to community, love of earth, peace and justice making. **Amen**

Introduction:

As Synagogues celebrate the Jewish holiday of Shavuot and Christians approach Pentecost, we reflect on the coming of the Holy Spirit for all God's people and the background of these two festivals.

The popular author Roald Dahl once said, "A person who has good thoughts cannot ever be ugly. You can have a wonky nose and a crooked mouth and a double chin and stick-out teeth, but if you have good thoughts, they will shine out of your face like sunbeams, and you will always look lovely."

I believe what Dahl reflects here are two things. The first is the existence of ugliness, and the second is the power of the Spirit to rest in the human heart and make everything beautiful again if we are willing. In the Bible, we are told how Moses radiated with God's Shekinah Glory when he came down from the mountain after receiving the Ten Commandments (Exodus 34:29-35). Elsewhere we read of how Wisdom illuminates, from within the human heart (Ecclesiastes 8:1). Jesus revealed Shekinah on a mountain, the Apostle John said that Jesus "dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father" (John 1:14). Jesus is "the light of men," shining in darkness. Here, Jesus briefly peeled back His humanity to allow the disciples to see the very glory of God. When Jesus ascended into heaven after His resurrection, He ascended with glory into the clouds.

The word Shekinah is from the Hebrew word 'shekinot', which means where God is dwelling, settling or where His Divine Presence is. The Benedictine monk, Br. Stuart of Mucknell Abbey notes in a Pentecost reflection that the Buddha when he gained enlightenment, said: "There was light." The Spirit, however, we understand her, dwells in the willing heart, which says a lot about the work needed to cultivate our personal hospitality for God and the needs and differences we find in each other.

When we celebrate Pentecost, we often don't much consider the Spirit as a gift to all people or the significance of Pentecost as a fruit of hospitality, our gift to each other as much as our openness to God. "By their fruits you will know them", we are told regarding those with the Spirit resting in their hearts (Matthew 7:16). Wisdom is spoken of similarly in the book of James "But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere." (James 3:17). When the Bible speaks of the Spirit, it describes universal qualities of goodness.

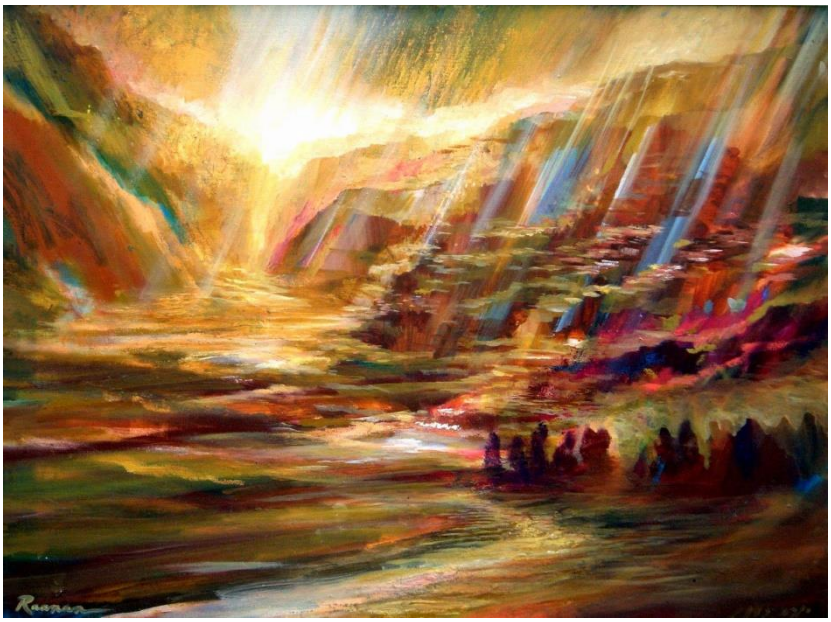
The Pentecost account of Luke in the Acts of the Apostles was written from a Jewish perspective. The narrative speaks of a fruitful harvest of believers who received a direct experience of God's Spirit because of their hospitality. Benedictine Abbess, Hildegard of Bingen speaks of the Holy Spirit as a comforting fire, the life of all creation. In the

Jewish tradition, Wisdom speaks about the Spirit of Fire as a flaming pillar, guiding God's people (Wisdom 18:3). No one is excluded from God's invitation; we choose whether or not to accept.

The Pentecost Narrative in the New Testament: "When the day of Pentecost had come, they (the Disciples) 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…And at this sound, the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each." On this day, three thousand more were added to the number of disciples, many were converts from the 'nations.' "They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers... And day by day, the Lord added to their number." (Acts 2:41-4),

Pentecostal Christians interpret Acts 2 as a sign of Baptism in the Holy Spirit, of which one gift is speaking in tongues. In Biblical history, like today, there were many from different lands living in Jerusalem; each heard the Spirit speaking about God's work of power in a language they could understand (Acts 2:1-4). What we can't assume is that this language was a tongue; it could just as easily have been an understood belief or spirituality. God's signs and wonders at Pentecost reveal the Holy Spirit as a fluid filler of spiritual spaces, including spirituality which some may consider unsuitable, empty or broken.

The Pentecost Narrative in the Old Testament and Jewish Tradition: While most Christians know that Pentecost is a celebration of the birth of the Church through the coming of the Holy Spirit in mighty wind and tongues of Fire. Less commonly known is the Jewish background of this event. On the first Pentecost (Shavuot), signs and wonders accompanied the giving of the Torah (Jewish law) to Moses at Mount Sinai. When he came down from Sinai with the two tablets inscribed with the Ten Commandments, Moses' face shone because he had been talking with God. So bright was Moses' face reflecting God's Shekinah glory that he had to put a veil over himself so that people were not blinded by the intensity of the light (Exodus 34). As Moses descended the mountain, God's Spirit descended as smoke, Fire, and cloud just as it did for the Disciples at the later Pentecost event. The Jewish Midrash speaks of flames of Fire that came to each individual; the Children of Israel not only heard the Lord's voice but saw the sound waves as they emerged from the Lord's mouth. They visualised them as a fiery substance (see image below). Each commandment that left the Lord's mouth travelled around the entire camp and then came back to every believer individually." The second miracle the Midrash preserves is the voice of God speaking in every language known to man. It says: "And all the people witnessed the thunderings" (Exodus 20:15).



The descent of the Spirit at Sinai and the receiving of the Torah heralds the Jewish feast of Shavuot, the Festival of the Leavened bread. Shavuot is also the forerunner to the feast of Pentecost, which Christians would later celebrate. In both events, the Spirit of God is heard and experienced by all people, not just Jews and Christians.

In the Jewish tradition, The blood of the Passover lamb symbolises the rescue of the Hebrew people from slavery in Egypt, culminating at Sinai. In the days of the First and Second Temples, The Mishnah (Rabbinic literature) describes a Shavuot pilgrimage of Israelites converging on Jerusalem for Passover and Shavuot bringing the first fruits from their crops and offerings from their flocks to the Temple. "The worshippers converged on Jerusalem from all over the land of Israel. In their hands, they carried baskets of the first fruits of their produce. The wealthy carried baskets overlaid with silver and gold while the poor carried wicker baskets made from peeled willow branches. Those who lived near Jerusalem brought fresh figs and

grapes; those from a distance brought dried figs and raisins instead." Passover, Shavuot and Sukkot became three Biblical pilgrimage festivals that celebrate the seasonal harvests: Spring, Summer and Autumn.

Shavuot is traditionally celebrated 49 days after the first sabbath of the Passover during the Festival of Unleavened Bread. The fiftieth day, the day after Shavuot, is the appointed time of the Christian Feast of Pentecost. Both the English and Hebrew names for the festivals reflect these timings. The English word, Pentecost, is from the Greek term for 'fifty,' the Hebrew name for the Jewish Festival is Shavuot, meaning weeks. Shavuot/ Pentecost concludes the festival season that began with Passover celebrated as the Last Supper for Christians, which according to the Gospel of John, was celebrated the night before the sacrifice of the Passover lambs (Korban Pesach). In other words, Jesus may have conducted the Last Supper a full day before the Jewish people partake of the Passover Seder meal. (John 13–1;17). For Christians, Jesus is the Passover Lamb who saves us from slavery to transgression.

Agricultural metaphors of 'fruitfulness were commonly used to represent God's Spirit at work in and for his people. Jesus himself said to his Disciples, "The harvest is plentiful, but the labourers are few; therefore, ask the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into his harvest." The harvest spoken of here is the abundance of believers and the work needed to convert them (Matthew 9 37-38). The Spirit is similarly described in agrarian terms in Galatians, where the signs of the Spirit are spoken of as fruits. "The of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control." (Galatians 5 22-23). The Christian feast of Pentecost relates to this same theme of fruitfulness that runs through the Jewish tradition.

It is easy to imagine that the Disciples and followers of Jesus described in Acts 2 joined into this First Fruits Shavuot procession. No doubt, the Festival in the year of Jesus' Crucifixion carried particular significance because it was fifty days after Jesus' Resurrection. In every sense, Jesus was the 'true vine (John 15:1), and the disciples were the First Fruits of Jesus ministry, which is perhaps a call to reflect on our own fruitfulness. The Disciples celebrating the agricultural Festival of Shavuot knew the story of the words of Fire resting on each individual at Sinai. They knew the story of God's voice speaking to all humankind in every language. The miracles and signs and wonders of Acts 2 carried deep significance and prophetic fulfilment for the early Church. Most significantly for us today, the Spirit received at Sinai, and the Spirit received in Jerusalem are substantially of the same essence. The theology of both of these festivals celebrates the accessibility of God to all people through the Holy Spirit. Moreover, in both the Old and New Testaments, God spoke in the languages of all people, many of whom were neither Jew nor Christian, a clear call to be hospitable and receive with generosity those others who may think and act differently to ourselves.

As the present crisis in Jerusalem continues, I am reminded of a quotation from the Sufi poet, Jalaluddin Rumi: "Listen with ears of tolerance! See-through the eyes of compassion! Speak with the language of love." If we could 'see' God's voice as the people did at Sinai, perhaps [S]he would say something similar to the words of Rumi in response to the many examples of war, unrest and everyday intolerance. May we learn to love abundantly!

Beginning Meditation: Let us prepare now for our meditation. Notice any tightness in your shoulders and neck and allow any tension in your muscles to relax. Allow your back to rest upright. Be conscious of where your body is touching the chair. Allow your breathing to settle; allow your body to slow down. You may wish to repeat a sacred word silently, bring to mind an image or simply focus on your breath as an aid to mediation.

25-minute meditation begins…

After Meditation: The Spirit of Wisdom is showing herself

"Little by little, from a deep level, the Spirit of Wisdom is showing herself. Sophia dwells in the hearts of those who seek new dreams and hope for a more wholesome world: the Dorothy Days, the Martin Luther Kings, the Archbishop Romeros ... [there are so many now!]. Sophia rejoices in the visionaries and the peace-makers. She fills them. In a world which is hungry, tired and seeking, God's presence is shown in Sophia through people who are to experience, in our insecure world, God's wholesome vision and dream for the human race, born of both the masculine and the feminine Holy Energies."

from a warm moist salty God by Edwina Gateley
Edwina Gately | July/August 2004 (Vol. XVII, No. 7)

Holy Spirit Comforting Fire – Hildegard of Bingen

Holy Spirit,
Comforting Fire,
Life of all creation.
Anointing the sick, cleansing body and soul,
Fill this body!

Holy Spirit,
Sacred breath, Fire of love,
Sweetest taste, Beautiful aroma,
Fill this heart!

Holy Spirit,
Filling the world,
from the heights to the deep,
Raining from clouds, filling rivers and sea,
Fill this mind!

Holy Spirit,
Forgiving and giving,
uniting strangers, reconciling enemies,
Seeking the lost and enfolding us together,
Fill these gathered here!

Holy Spirit,
Bringing light into dark places, igniting praise,
Greatest gift, our Hope and Encourager,
Holy Spirit of Christ,
I praise you!

Amen.





Hildegard of Bingen (1098-1179AD)

Closing prayer: Loving and Eternal God, we thank you for the gifts of prayer, meditation and contemplation. We thank you for being with us and for this community. May we, therefore, pray with all others, as one community, one world and one Spirit to One God…Take some time for your personal prayer …**Amen**

Thank you for meditating with us; please join us again soon.

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