

Pentecost; Presence, Perspective, Power.

What are you made of?

The simple answer of course is that you are made of atoms; trillions of them. Those atoms form molecules which form cells which form systems which form the larger, more complicated system known as 'you'.

And yet if we were to deconstruct 'you', system by system, cell by cell, we could never locate the unique essence that is *you*. Just as a song is more than the sum of its notes; as a poem is more than its words; so we are more, much more than the sum of our parts.

There are dimensions to our consciousness, our personality, our awareness that transcend our physicality. We sometimes call this... soul.

In the early 20th Century a Dr Duncan MacDougal published what he believed to be scientific evidence for the existence of the human soul. By weighing several bodies just before and after death he recorded a weight loss of three fourths of an ounce or 21 grams.

Whatever it is that makes you *you* however cannot be measured or assessed in any conventional, rational or scientific way. The Germans have a word for this – *grenzbegrifflich*; (no idea how that's pronounced but for the purposes of this sermon we'll call it that German word). That German word describes something very real that nevertheless defies explanation.

The Bible very beautifully sums us up as a fusion of the dust of the earth (atoms) and the breath of God (soul).

Among the Norwegians there is a legend that, before a soul is put into the body, that soul is kissed by God. And during all of its life on earth, the soul retains a dark but powerful memory of that kiss.

We humans are the only species it seems who intuitively sense that there is meaning to our existence. Increasingly after that momentary blip in human history where for a few centuries, logic and scientific reasoning reigned, we are once again waking up to the truth that there is a whole universe of 'that German word' and that we human beings are quintessentially spiritual.

It's interesting that in the Hebrew language there is no word for spirituality. Jesus himself never used that terminology. Why? Well because for him and his people, everything was spiritual; there is no distinction between sacred and secular; spiritual and material, natural and supernatural, body and soul; everything is spiritual. Too often I think we live compartmentalised, schizophrenic lives which confine the spiritual to certain practices or prayer and yet spirituality has as much to do with our tax returns or the TV we watch.

Humanity is hardwired to its source; to its Creator. The Psalms talk about the deep within us calling out to the depths of God; our souls homesick for the divine; this memory of God's kiss restless within us.

And today we celebrate a defining moment in the history of the human soul; a momentous event that changed the course of its history. The Hebrew prophets had long foretold of a time coming when God's Spirit; the life-force of the universe would break into this reality in a new, never-before-experienced way. Later Jesus himself, when preparing his friends for his departure, spoke of sending the same Spirit who in his words 'is *with* you but will on that day be *in* you'.

And then at last, on this day of Pentecost these faithful, expectant men and women, gathered in an upstairs room, heard a sound like a rushing wind, and then tongues of fire appeared upon their heads. And from their mouths came new languages; and that day 3000 souls suddenly remembered the kiss of God and the church was born.

The Holy Spirit – free and ungraspable as the wind; like fire illuminating our lives, burning away the dross; creating, sustaining, challenging, transforming; the gravity, the energy, the love of God which has always been with humanity, now *in* us. Because ultimately this is what we were designed for. Without the Spirit we are deserts devoid of water, kites without wind; birds without wings. We are not fully alive, not fully human.

But if we welcome the Holy Spirit, make her at home within us, then life takes on a whole new dimension. With the Spirit's help we begin to become who we were created to be; we become channels of life and compassion and hope.

And all we have to do is ask (the simple bit) and surrender (the hard bit); surrender our own desire to be in control.

In this surrender we can begin to know something of the Presence, the Power and the Perspective of God.

The Presence; that sense that we are not alone; that we are in the very company of God.

Is that something we long for? We are I believe all at heart lonely for exactly this; intimacy with God. If so, are we willing to welcome and make room for God's Spirit in the knowledge that she will in time begin to rearrange the furniture of our lives? And are we willing, even if we *feel* nothing, to remain open and receptive; to choose to believe that God is with us, within us, for us, even if we cannot evidence it?

Power; the same power that created and sustains all things working in us and through us.

Do we long to cooperate with God in his desire to bring life and healing and wholeness to creation? Are we willing to channel this power through the work of prayer? Do we desire something of that power for our own lives; for those areas where we need strength to overcome or forgive?

And lastly Perspective; seeing things from God's eye view.

Do we need to be lifted up out of our circumstances even for a moment to see the bigger picture? Do we need light for the path ahead; a clarity, an understanding of what is... of what is important... of what it real?

Jesus said 'the Spirit is with but will be in you' God's presence, God's power, God's perspective. Waiting for our invitation, again or for the first time.

Jesus made us a promise that when we ask for the Spirit, we will receive the Spirit. So just as those men and women waited in expectation that first Pentecost...

We have an opportunity now, this Pentecost, in a few moments of silence to pray those three words that still change history by changing you and me. Come Holy Spirit.

And after those few moments of silence we can join our prayers with those of the choir who will lead us in its Latin 'veni sancte spiritus'

*Gracious God, we give you thanks
for the reign of your servant Elizabeth our Queen,
and for the example of loving and faithful service
which she has shown among us.
Help us to follow her example of dedication
and to commit our lives to you and to one another,
through Jesus Christ our Lord.*

Amen.