

**10am 24<sup>th</sup> May 2026 All-Age Parish Communion**

**Acts 1:1-21, 1 Cor 12:3b-13, John 7:37-39 – *the Spirit works through everybody, proclaiming Jesus as Lord and uniting his church***

On family holidays, playing “Who am I?”, it is very easy to find that I’ve selected a person – who might be historical, or contemporary, or even fictional – who I think I know reasonably well, only to find that I’m being asked questions I don’t know how to answer. It turns out that my knowledge of that person was not as detailed or as deep as it needed to be.

I suspect many of us feel the same about the Holy Spirit – the 3<sup>rd</sup> person of our Trinitarian God-in-three-persons, whose coming at Pentecost we celebrate today. The Pentecost story is a dramatic story, but how does it help us who are here today to know who the Holy Spirit is, and what he does?

Just to recap, suddenly 120 people who were the first followers of Jesus ***begin to speak in other languages*** and even though ***all these who are speaking [are] Galileans ... the devout Jews from every nation under heaven [who are] living in Jerusalem ... heard them speaking in the native language of each ... in their own languages they hear them speaking about God’s deeds of power.***

So what does this tell us about the Holy Spirit?

This episode might remind us of the Babel-Fish in *The Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Galaxy*, or of the Tardis’ Translator Circuit in Dr Who, a technology which leaves every one of Dr Who’s companions absolutely astonished that they can now “speak alien”. But remember that it was through the Translator Circuit that the inhabitants of other planets heard Dr Who speaking in their own language, which invariably allowed him to save them from whatever it was that had placed them in peril.

For those devout Jews of every nation who realised that they can suddenly understand these Galileans, what is happening to them is just as much a miracle as the Translator Circuit was to Dr Who’s companions. They don’t

understand how it works, but that doesn't matter; they are being saved by hearing people ***speaking about God's deeds of power.***

In our gospel reading Jesus promised that the Holy Spirit was for anyone who is thirsty, and that ***out of the believer's heart shall flow rivers of living water.*** But how are we to recognise the work of the Holy Spirit?

Paul gives us two distinct ways of knowing whether what is being done by people in church is being activated by the Spirit.

The first thing to ask is: is what is being done *recognising* and *proclaiming* Jesus as Lord?

The church in Corinth was falling into factions over which gift of the Holy Spirit was the most significant. That's why Paul was so insistent that whilst there might be varieties of gifts, varieties of services and varieties of activities, it is always the same Spirit, the same Lord, and the same God ***who activates all of them in everyone.*** The nature of the gift, or service, or activity does not matter, ***all of these are activated by one and the same Spirit.***

And it is against that background that Paul writes: ***no one can say "Jesus is Lord!" except by the Holy Spirit.***

Why does Paul begin by using this as the touchstone? Because in a church that is fighting over whose work is more important, recognising that you have been saved from your sin and reconciled with God not by anything you are doing, but by Jesus' death on the cross, and that ***Jesus is Lord*** is the ultimate leveller.

Martin Luther put it this way: *I believe that by my own understanding or strength I cannot*

- *believe in Jesus Christ my Lord*
- *Or come to him,*

*But ... the Holy Spirit has called me through the gospel, [and] enlightened me with his gifts.*

The church that is proclaiming that ***Jesus is Lord*** is a church where the Holy Spirit is at work.

If a time-traveller were to come to us today from 100 years ago, from 1926 when the building was less than half the size that it is now, somehow slipping through a time-vortex to be with us this morning, would they agree that in everything that we are saying and doing, ***Jesus is Lord*** for us, just as much as it was for them and their fellow believers in the 1920s?

Enabling people to say “Jesus is Lord” is what the Holy Spirit does. If we’re not saying it, if we’re not living it, is the Holy Spirit present in what we are doing?

The second thing that Paul would ask is: is what is being done *uniting* us rather than *dividing* us?

Paul writes in verse 7: ***To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.*** So it is good to ask: is this activity for our mutual benefit? Is it building us up? Is it strengthening our faith? Is it helping us to know and to love God our Father, and to know ourselves as loved by him? Is it helping us to love our neighbour, increasing the love we have for one another and for the people around us?

So whether it is Soul Space, or an All Age service with something imaginatively creative, or the Sunday Evensong where the choir leads and everybody joins in, or the Tuesday Evensong when we listen and let the beautiful music of the Charter Choir speak to our souls; all of these are activities that proclaim that Jesus is Lord, and all of these are ***for the common good.***

Whether it is Toddle along, the community lunch, offering hospitality and practical help to one another and to people in the community; all of these are not only helping us to say “Jesus is Lord”, they too are also working for the common good. The Spirit-filled church looks beyond just the people who are within it. Outward-looking and mission-minded, it faces into the future with the help of the Spirit.

In verses 6 and 7 Paul is very clear that the Holy Spirit is in everybody, and is working through everybody, and is for the benefit of everybody. You might not see your gift, or service or activity in Paul's list, but that doesn't mean that it isn't of the Holy Spirit.

All our regular and the occasional activities – the small groups where people are sharing their experience of the Christian life, the book club, the St John's walkers, the pilgrimages, the quiet day... All of these are offering the opportunity to have a longer conversation, or to ask questions, as a way of exploring where we are on our faith journey. Any of these can be occasions for the Holy Spirit to prompt somebody to ask a searching question, or to offer a word of affirmation or encouragement or of godly advice.

If what the church is doing is of the Holy Spirit, it will all testify to the love and the lordship of Jesus. And in the diversity of the activities, everything can be seen as being ***for the common good***. The true work of the Spirit says ***Jesus is Lord*** and is ***for the common good***.