

## The Spirit of Fruitfulness - Pentecost 2026

Date: 24 May 2026 Pentecost

Location: St George's Battery Point

Series: Holy Spirit

Texts: Ezekiel 27:1-14; Galatians 5.13-26; John 14.15-27

I have to confess that I'm a bit of a fan of the actor Arnold Schwarzenegger. In the film Kindergarten Cop he plays a detective who goes undercover as a school teacher to try and find a drug dealer. In one scene he's trying to get information out of the kinder kids. He asks them, "Who is your daddy and what does he do?"

Today is Pentecost. It's the third great festival of the Christian calendar. At Christmas we remember the Incarnation, that God became one of us. At Easter we remember Jesus' death for the forgiveness of our sins and his glorious resurrection. Pentecost is the day 50 days after Easter when God sent the Holy Spirit on the first disciples. And God still gives the Holy Spirit today to all who put their trust in Jesus as their Saviour and follow him as their King.

If you'll excuse the way my mind works, today we're asking the question, Who is the Holy Spirit and what does he do? These are big questions beyond the scope of a single sermon, so we'll focus our attention on those two readings from John and Galatians.

**Who is the Holy Spirit?** In our gospel reading we see Jesus teaching his disciples on the night before he died. And this is what he said about the Holy Spirit. John 14.15

"If you love me, you will obey what I command. 16 And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever— 17 the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you. 18 I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you.

Did you see there? Jesus says, the Holy Spirit is a Counselor or some translations say advocate. He is sent by the Father. He's the Spirit of Truth. Jesus promised his disciples, "I will not leave you as orphans but will come to you." And then in verse 23 we see how Jesus will keep that promise.

23 "If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him.

Jesus says that he and his Father will make their home in those who love and obey him. The way Jesus and the Father do this is by the Holy Spirit. Jesus died for our sins, rose again on

the third day, and then, 40 days later ascended into heaven. That's where he is right now, sitting at the Father's right hand. But God has poured out his Holy Spirit on the church, on all who love and obey Jesus. The Holy Spirit is God's presence with us now.

In 1 Corinthians 6 St Paul says the same thing. He says, "if you're a follower of Christ, your *body* is a temple of the Holy Spirit."<sup>1</sup> What is a temple? It's the place where a god lives. And so if you're a Christian, your body is a temple because God lives inside you by his Holy Spirit.

Because of Jesus' words here in John 14 elsewhere the Bible refers to the Holy Spirit as the Spirit of God, the Spirit of the Father and the Spirit of Christ. As you can see, talking about the Holy Spirit invites us into the mystery of the Trinity, that God is one, and yet three persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The point for today is that in the person of the Holy Spirit God gives his very life and presence to be with us and to live in us. And so, we're not alone. "I will not leave you orphans," Jesus says. The Father gives us the Holy Spirit. And Jesus says,

26 ... the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you. 27 Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you.

Do you yearn for a connection with God? You won't find it through meditation or getting lost in nature. Jesus says it's here, in the gift of the Holy Spirit. What you sense in those things is his voice calling you.

Do you want wisdom for life? It's not through listening to some guru or Tick Tock influencer or following 12 rules for life. The Spirit is the Spirit of Truth and he will guide you and remind you of Jesus' words.

Do you long for peace? You won't find it through yoga, or mindfulness, not really. It's found here in the Holy Spirit, our helper and counselor.

The Holy Spirit is God's presence with us. But he is also God's power at work *in* us. And that leads to our second point, **What does the Holy Spirit do?**

This, of course, is a very big question. This morning I wanted to focus on the answer St Paul gives in our second reading, Galatians 5.

We've already seen hints in what Jesus says, "If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. He who does not love me will not obey my teaching." Or, seen from another angle, if our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit then it matters a great deal what we do with our bodies.

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<sup>1</sup> 1 Corinthians 6.19

In Galatians 5 Paul describes an internal conflict that takes place in the lives of all who follow Christ.

So I say, live (or more accurately, walk) by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. 17 For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want.

Paul's words here don't mean that our bodies are bad and that all that matters is the "spiritual". Rather the term *flesh* speaks of the sense that our bodily existence is all there is. The flesh is human life apart from God and turned away from God.

I always think of the line from the film, *The Matrix*, where one of the characters says, *To deny our impulses is to deny the very thing that makes us human*. Here Paul says, "Actually no. Those impulses, those *desires of the flesh*, they are our problem as human beings."

Martin Luther put it like this,

Our nature, [is] so deeply curved in on itself that it not only bends the best gifts of God towards itself [and] even uses God himself in order to attain these gifts, but it also fails to realize that it [...] seeks all things, even God, for its own sake."<sup>2</sup>

As human beings we're made for relationship. We're made to love God and to love our neighbour. That's what it looks like to be fully human. But those desires of the flesh, when we act them out, damage our humanity. They damage our relationship with God. They damage human communities. They damage ourselves. Verse 19.

The acts of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; 20 idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions 21 and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like.

Because these are destructive of our humanity they are dishonouring to God in whose image we are made and they have no place in the future that God is bringing in, nor in the life of his people today. And so Paul says,

I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God. (21)

On the other hand, verse 22-23 gives us a picture of what full human life looks like, and it's beautiful. "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law."

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<sup>2</sup> Luther's Works, American Edition, volume 25, page 291

Paul says that there is within each of us a conflict: a pull towards un-humanity and inhumanity, *the desires of the flesh*, and a pull towards true humanity, *what the Spirit desires*. I don't know about you, but I find that's a pretty good description of my experience of life. Sometimes I find myself pulled towards impurity, and rage, just to name a couple of things from that list. I know it's wrong and damaging to myself and others and dishonouring to God and yet something inside me pulls me that way, and especially when I'm tired or stressed or bored but sometimes just out of the blue. I experience the weakness of the flesh. And yet there alongside is the pull of the Holy Spirit, to say no to those things and to instead act in love and patience and faithfulness and self control.

At that point I've got a choice: to say "no" to the Spirit, and "yes" to the flesh, or to say "no" to the flesh and "yes" to the Spirit. And Paul says, 24,

Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.

If you're a Christian, you belong to Christ. He's given us the Holy Spirit, God's life and power at work in us. Apart from Christ and the Spirit we're dead. Our whole being is oriented towards death and that is expressed in us acting out the desires of our flesh. But when you come to Christ, you lay those at the foot of the cross. We're made alive by the Spirit. The power of the same Spirit which raised Christ from the dead is also at work in us. Paul says, we're led by the Spirit. And so we're called to walk by the Spirit and keep in step with the Spirit. And by his mighty power we will be able to say "no" to sin and "yes" to God.

This is the daily and ordinary experience of the Holy Spirit at work in our lives as followers of Christ. The Spirit's work is to break the power of sin in our lives. For some things that can be in an instant. For other things it can be slowly over time, as we learn to say no to sin and yes to him. And it's the Spirit's work to produce that beautiful fruit in us. Sometimes that's easier to see in others than in ourselves. I often feel like I'm battling with the same things I was years ago. At the same time, when you think you've got on top of something, the Spirit shows you other areas you need to grow in. For me at the moment it's patience and gentleness.

But the Spirit does this because God's purpose is to transform us more and more into the likeness of Christ so that more and more we reflect his glory. That's why this is central to our vision as St George's. God has called us as St George's to be the Light on the Hill. Our vision is to see people drawn to the light of Christ, transformed by the light of Christ and sent out to shine the light of Christ. As a minister this is one of the most precious things that I get to see: God at work in you, transforming you by his Holy Spirit to be more like Jesus. So today,

where is it that the Spirit is leading you to change? What acts of the flesh do you need to say no to?

*sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies*

What fruit would you like to grow in?

*love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control*

Ask the Holy Spirit to empower you to make that change and grow his fruit in you.

If you're not a Christian, or you don't know if you've been given the Holy Spirit, you can receive the gift of the Spirit today.

At the first Pentecost, the apostle Peter said to the crowd listening, "Repent and be baptised everyone one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. This promise is for you and for your children."<sup>3</sup> Repent means to turn around. It means to say sorry to God for living your life your own way and to turn to him. Baptism is a sign of a new identity and new allegiance where you trust Jesus as your Saviour and you obey him as your King. You might have been baptised as a child but you've never made that decision to trust Jesus. You're trying to forgive yourself instead of trusting Jesus for forgiveness. You've not committed to obeying him as your king. Why don't you do that today? You could say something like this: "God, I'm sorry for living my life my own way. Jesus thank you for dying for my sin on the cross. Please forgive me. I commit to obey you as my king. Please give me the gift of your Holy Spirit." If you ask God that prayer, He will answer.

Listen to Jesus promise in Luke 11.

"Which of you fathers, if your son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead? 12 Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? 13 If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!"

You might like to say that prayer silently while we're singing in response to the sermon. Or maybe while we're sharing communion, that symbolic meal remembering Jesus' death for our sins and his blood shed for our forgiveness. Kneeling can be for you a physical act of coming to God humbly in repentance. Stretching out your hands could be for you a moment where you open your hands to receive God's forgiveness. The prayer as we finish could be a prayer of commitment for you, for the first time, or a recommitment, to offer your life as a

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<sup>3</sup> Acts 2.38-39

living sacrifice in worship to God, and asking God to fill you with his Spirit to live and work for him. If you're not ready to take that step, you could come forward for a blessing, asking that God would bless you by leading you to the truth where you have questions, and preparing your heart to receive him. If you take that step today, or if you want to find out more, do please come and speak to myself or a Christian friend after the service.