

On the first day of Pentecost, there were Jesus' followers gathered together in an upper room,

when there came the sound like a rush of wind and tongues of fire and these disciples were transformed, losing the shackles of their fear and finding their voice out in the streets of Jerusalem.

It's sometimes called the birthday of the church, the day on which the Holy Spirit of God birthed the church into being.

And here we are today, 2000 years later, part of that world-wide church, celebrating that great event that changed the world.

Now, if we were part of that branch of Christ's church that is known as the Eastern Orthodox Church we would notice one or two features of our service.

The church would be decorated in green, and in some places there would be branches from birch trees, and fresh green grass would be scattered on the floor and flowers strewn around.

In other words there would be signs of nature, of God's good creation and this would be wonderfully appropriate.

The reason is that the feast of Pentecost that was being celebrated that day by the thousands of pilgrims who converged on Jerusalem was originally an agricultural festival, a seasonal celebration of God's provision in nature.

Pentecost was originally a kind of harvest thanksgiving, celebrating the coming of the wheat harvest.

Later on in the year when the barley had ripened there would be a much bigger harvest, when the full bounty of God's great provision was gathered in.

But meanwhile, anticipating that by several months, there came this first harvest, this partial harvest, these first-fruits of the earth.

And what a wonderful and beautifully appropriate occasion for God's Spirit to give birth to the Church.

The church, that zone where the Holy Spirit of God is given to God's people with new life and salvation, is after all just a preview of a far greater harvest at the end of all things.

Then, many from all over God's earth will be gathered into God's Kingdom.

We, the church, those who acknowledge and confess Jesus Christ as Lord now are but the first-fruits of a far greater harvest that will be gathered in on that day.

So what a great occasion for the church to be born, the feast of Pentecost.

There is, however, another crucial point to note here and it's this.

This Holy Spirit of God that fell upon the disciples in that upper room is a Spirit that is also at work in nature, in creation, in the earth and its processes.

Think of that beautiful Psalm we read from earlier, Psalm 104.

It's a nature psalm, a celebration of God's handiwork.

It extols God for his abundant creativity and provision, in the array and diversity of earth's creatures and in harvest and all that God has made.

As verse 30 says, 'When you send forth your spirit, they are created...'.

And we see here such a link between nature and the church.

Think about it.

This little group gathered together in that upper room – they are so vulnerable.

They are utterly dependent upon the Spirit of God.

Without the Spirit they will be wiped out.

So too with all creation.

All living things, indeed all that exists is upheld and quickened by the Spirit of God.

The Spirit pervades all that God has made and withdraw the Spirit and all creation collapses into nothing.

So, the Spirit was there at the beginning, brooding over the deep, birthing order and life out of chaos.

And in Paul's letter to the Church at Rome in the great eighth chapter he pictures all creation groaning – groaning in pain and futility for this is what has come upon it.

But the Holy Spirit is pictured groaning there too, groaning with and in creation, like a mother in labour, sighing and crying with distress.

Truly the Spirit of God breathes and grieves in and with all created things.

And it's no wonder therefore that the Spirit comes upon the disciples in these elements of wind and fire.

In wind and fire creation is forged!

In wind and fire the new creation of the church is forged!

So, could it be one of those strange coincidences that Pentecost this year – the festival of the Spirit that animates creation - coincides with the

American President pulling out of the Paris Accord on climate change?

It's not my place to take sides on the climate change debate but whatever your views, think on this:

if the Spirit of Pentecost binds together creation and salvation;

if the Spirit of God is blowing through the foundations of creation as well as in that upper room in Jerusalem where the church was born, then to sin against the Holy Spirit takes on a whole new meaning.

It includes sinning against what God has made and plundering God's handiwork.

And we must ask what we are doing with and to God's creation.

Today we gather at the table where we are given bread to eat and wine to drink.

Bread and wine, the fruit of earth's harvest.

Here we meet Christ.

Here we are refreshed by the Spirit of God.

Here our lives are anchored in heaven and on earth, in creation and in the new creation.

So come.

Eat. Drink.

And then live in step with the Holy Spirit of God wherever she may blow. Amen.

O gracious and holy God,
Eternal Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
Maker Saviour and redeemer of the world,
we bless and praise your Holy Name.
And today, on this Pentecost Sunday,
we praise you Holy Spirit,
Breath of God,
Source and Giver of Life,
alive in all living things.
We praise you, Holy Spirit,
Gift of God, who enriches life
by giving us gifts and talents and energy.
We praise you, Holy Spirit,
who came upon the first disciples on the Day of Pentecost
and equipped them to be the church and to take the Gospel
to all the earth, bearing witness to Jesus.
O God forgive us for when we quench and stifle your Spirit;
forgive us for when we misuse or neglect the gifts you have given us;
forgive us when we fail to love, for you are love.
Breathe afresh upon us we pray,
breath forgiveness upon us and breath new life into us,
and so may we be people of the Spirit,
showing Jesus to the world.
We pray in Jesus, name...