

17 - 23 May 2020

## The Spirit beside us

**Related Bible reading(s): John 14.15-21**

# PostScript: The Spirit inside us

A reflection for the sixth Sunday of Easter

## Reflection

What is the spirit of the age? Or, to put it another way, what do you feel is the overwhelming spirit of the people or community around you at this time?

In many ways we might be seeing the best of people in terms of neighbourliness, exhibited in the spirit of caring communities where we live. Despite social distancing, many are communicating and caring for those around them in ways they might never have done before. Last week's 75th anniversary celebrations for VE Day might have included much reminiscing about 'wartime spirit', but they also prompted reflections on the spirit of people in the UK in this current moment, battling the coronavirus situation we find ourselves in, as well as being hopeful that it will come to an end at some point.

This week's Gospel reading, John 14.15-21, invites us to make a connection between loving Jesus and keeping his commandments. (This refers back to John 13.34-35, Jesus' new commandment to love one another, and encourages us to look forward to John 15.9-14, where Jesus instructs about a love that lives and grows and connects us to him, to God and to one another.)

Jesus promises his disciples that he will ask God to give them a 'helper' – or 'advocate' or 'comforter' – who will be with them always once he himself has physically left them. This Spirit of God will live (abide) beside them and inside them. This is the Spirit that will create a spirit within each person to carry them through the scary trials and challenges of the times that lay ahead of them.

Jesus' opening words in verse 15 create a sense of an endless round: if you love Jesus you will keep his commandments to love; and in doing so will be loved by his Father; and continue to enter into ever deeper and more loving

relationships through living out his commandments. (You might like to read that last sentence over a few times, and rephrase it in your own words, as its meaning sinks in).

Jesus is beginning to excite the unwitting disciples by teasing them with clues about the gift he is going to leave them, a farewell present for when he is gone. It might be a confusing metaphor to say that Jesus is peeling back the corners of the wrapping paper on his gift to tantalise them with a glimpse because, at this point in John's Gospel, he hasn't really wrapped the gift yet, let alone labelled it and put a bow around it – that is still to come. Nevertheless, the promised gift of the Spirit, when it arrives, will give them all they need to model the love of Jesus for others.

How can we model the love of Jesus for others today? Whether this gift, for us when we unwrap it, bursts out with joy like a toy jack-in-the-box\* or comforts like a soothing skin balm\* it will be whatever God needs it to be for us to be enabled to lovingly care for others in this present moment. *\* insert your own appropriate gift analogy!*

This Spirit is the one who Jesus promises will always be alongside us and within us – the one who will never desert us in our hour of need. For so many, this is that hour – receive, then, the Spirit of this age...

## **Prayer**

*A personal prayer of thanksgiving.*

Thank you, Lord, for the...

Sorry, Lord, this feels a bit like when my mother used to make me write thank-you letters to relatives at Christmas and birthdays, when I wasn't really sure what I was thankful for.

It's not that your gift looks like one of those jumpers that Aunty Ruth knitted for me with a head hole I can't fit my head through, one arm twice as long as the other and a picture of a tiger on the front!

And it's not that your gift is like one of those unidentifiable but really useful gadgets from Uncle Bob, where the instruction book would take me three weeks solid reading to plough through.

On the contrary – your gift almost seems too simple: Helper; Advocate; Intercessor; Counsellor; Intermediary; Comforter; Spirit of Truth.

Thank you for your gift.

It's just that...

I'm not sure what to do with it!

You said: 'You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you.'

Maybe that is the answer.

Alongside me.

Within me.

I need to let things simply be;  
not overthink things;  
and trust that, when the time is right,  
your Spirit will show me the way  
to love and care and be alongside others  
in their hour of need.

You said: 'If you love me, you will keep my commandments.'

I promise,

I will.

By the love of the oneness of the Father, the Son and the Spirit.

I promise I will accept your gift  
and live out your love.

Thank you.

Amen.

### **Young children's coronavirus quiz**

Heidi (aged 5), who would usually come along to our church with her family, was quizzed by her mum about coronavirus, after finding something similar to this quiz on Facebook. Why not ask your child about what's happening now and what they think about it? (I've included Heidi's answers because they made me smile!)

1. What is the coronavirus? (*Heidi: 'It's a big cough that goes all round the world.'*)

2. Who is the prime minister? (*Heidi: 'He's the boss of the whole wide world.'*)

3. How many days have we been in lockdown? (*Heidi: 'About 100.'*)
  4. Do you want to go back to school? (*Heidi: 'Yes.'*)
  5. Who is the first person you are going to hug when lockdown ends? (*Heidi: 'Nell.' Best friend from school*)
  6. Where is the first place you want to go? (*Heidi: 'To my park.'*)
  7. What do you think we can do to get rid of the Corona virus? (*Heidi: 'Stay at home and stay safe.'*)
  8. Is mummy a good teacher? (*Heidi: 'Err, no! Because you're very boring.'*)
  9. If coronavirus was an animal what animal would it be? (*Heidi: 'Pig.'*)
  10. How did the coronavirus start? (*Heidi: 'Someone ate a bat.'*)
  11. If you had to wear protective clothing, what would it be? (*Heidi: 'A t-shirt, a jacket, a coat, and some trousers and socks and shoes.... Oh, and a mask!'*)
- Out of the mouths of babes! And, just because 11 is an odd number and 12 is a good biblical number, here is a twelfth question for you to ask your children:
12. What do you think Jesus would like us to do during lockdown?

### **Sing a new song worship activity**

Actor, comedian and writer Matt Lucas reworked his famous song 'Thank You Baked Potato', to raise awareness of and money for the NHS during the coronavirus pandemic.

Why not have some fun and become a songwriter yourself by taking a really well-known hymn tune and writing some new fun lyrics, which say something about the spirit of love you have seen exhibited in the place where you live and say 'thank you' to those who help and comfort you. For example, I might be inspired to write about someone living near us who is hanging sweets from the tree overhanging their front garden wall as treats for passers-by, to the tune of 'Thine be the glory':

*'Hey, lovely neighbours, thank you for the sweets,  
dangling in your garden, showering us with treats.  
The first time that I saw them I thought it looked quite odd,  
but your bright-coloured gift-tree made me give thanks to God!'*

I'm sure you can do better, but hopefully you get the idea! As the given psalm for this week, Psalm 66.8-20, sings in verse eight: 'Bless our God, O peoples, let the sound of his praise be heard'!

*Tim Lowe is a minister of the United Reformed Church, serving with St Andrew's Roundhay, in Leeds. Tim is interested in all forms of visual media as expressions of exploring what we believe as Christians. He is also an avid people-watcher (which might make him sound really weird!), but he is intrigued by the way people are reacting to one another in this present time and by the spirit that is driving them to love and care for one another more than 'normal'!*