

St James' Church, Weybridge

Pentecost Sunday 2026

Introduction and Call to Worship

Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your people and kindle in us holy fire – help us to pray, “Thy Kingdom Come!” Lord of creation we pray, move among your people here in Weybridge and set our hearts on fire with your reconciling love. Come and free us from all that binds us, that we may sing your praise and share our faith in many tongues and languages - Alleluia!

Today's Readings

First Reading Acts 2:1-21

God's Spirit brings courage and communication, and the Church is born.

Gospel John 20:19-23

The risen Jesus breathes the Spirit on his disciples and gives them a message of peace and forgiveness.

HOMILY *“Jesus breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit.” (John 20:22)*

Happy birthday! Is it anyone's actual birthday today? Birthdays are often a time of celebration, reflection, and of course, laughter! But they can also be a time of worry when we are faced with the challenges of life and the things that we perceive hold us back. We may be another year older but not always feel wiser!

It's funny the things we communicate in cards and messages at birthdays. Recently I saw one which read, “Age is only the number of years the world has so far enjoyed knowing you.” How lovely was that. Another one read, “Learn from the past, but remember you can't change it. Worry about the future, it is in front of you. And as for the present, I didn't get you one!”

And we often celebrate a birthday with cake – the number of candles giving away our age. It is interesting that we light candles on a birthday cake, a tradition from ancient times, with different cultures contributing to its development. For example, around 6th Century BC, in ancient Greece they celebrated the goddess Artemis, the goddess of the Moon, and childbirth, by offering cakes to the goddess, often round like the moon and adorned with lit candles. And like many different world-wide faiths, the burning smoke from the candles was thought to carry their wishes to the gods. Today birthday candles are a reminder of our age and a symbol of hope – just as we come to church and light candles and offer prayers to God who hears us when we pray in faith.

Those prayers we offer can be for wonderful things, like the celebration of a birthday. They can be in remembrance of those whom we love but see no longer. And they can also be prayers in times of anxiety and fear as we seek the help of God with the challenges and struggles of life. The disciples in today's Gospel know a thing or two about challenges, struggles, doubts and fears! They had left their homes, trades and families to follow Jesus who had been killed upon the Cross of Calvary, and now what should they do? Could they go back to their old lives? Even when they knew Jesus was alive again – and had experienced the joy of Easter and seen his resurrection presence, they were still afraid. Then Jesus had then ascended into heaven and left them yet again. And he had promised them a new Advocate – the Paraclete (John 14:16, 26), the same Holy Spirit that first moved over the waters of creation bringing everything into being, the same Spirit that overshadowed Mary when Jesus was conceived and the very

same life-giving Spirit that descended upon Jesus at his baptism in the form of a dove.

You see the Holy Spirit brings life, but the disciples don't yet feel like this is the start of something new and exciting. They don't seem to want a celebration and were living in scary times, coming to terms with change. Perhaps they can't yet perceive the creator is at work in creation, doing something new. They have so many questions. How could they speak, heal, teach and inspire like Jesus did? Most of us have similar questions and anxieties, and some of us may struggle in a similar way to those first disciples, ever facing change in our lives, with our bodies as we age, with politics and society and so much more?

So, what do they do? They remain behind locked doors, perhaps waiting in fear, their reason for inaction. They need strengthening; filling with hope and inspiration and after all, Jesus had promised that he would not leave them comfortless. Indeed, there is more to come.

On the day of Pentecost, why did the Holy Spirit choose tongues of fire? Because it wanted to spark conversation...!

The bright flames of Pentecost (of which the red candles around our church and beautiful flowers tell) burn with God's glory and transformation. The book of Acts tells how the Spirit has the disciples filled with joy, and conviction, able to tell the Good News, for Pentecost afford them the power of communication. They speak of God's love for all who would listen, in words people can hear and understand. How exciting! This really is transforming church and transforming lives! Pentecost is rightly the birthday of the Church when we are sent to the world, equipped for mission in action.

John's Gospel presents another perspective, with Jesus breathing the Spirit upon them – an encounter with the risen Lord of life and love that transforms them. Jesus speaks of peace, with their fears banished. With his living breath he empowers them to forgive and to reconcile! Forgiveness is something that we can struggle with, but Jesus promised the Holy Spirit enables us to do just that, to offer God's forgiveness and grace to others. Full of energy, at peace with themselves and one another, and unafraid, they are sent out and with that the Christian Church begins its mission.

The world can seem a fearful place. We may struggle with new technology and fear we can no longer communicate effectively with others because we aren't connected into the latest AI or social media feed. We might be afraid of illness or accident, of terrorist attack or war, of natural disaster, floods – a heatwave! But God is active in this world and longs to calm our fears. God is made known by the Holy Spirit, which descends at Pentecost to turn up the spiritual heat – it literally feels like that today in Weybridge!

Pentecost is the answer to our fears. Today, the birthday of the Church, Jesus breathes peace and power on his followers. Today the wind and fire of God's blessing settle on us. Today, together, we should not be afraid, as we offer our prayers to God who knows each and every one of us by name and breathes his peace into our lives. And if just a little of the Pentecost breeze descends upon us here today, we can by God's grace and blessing fulfil our tasks, to forgive others and ourselves, find the confidence to tell the Good News as disciples today, and realise God's vision for this place. Alleluia!

Father Damian Harrison-Miles, May 2026.