

WEEKLY SERMON

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This Day of Pentecost

Quite often I find myself behind bars.

Part of my work is to support our prison chaplains and that means I go and visit them in prison. As I walk round, outwardly I am calm and collected and professional. Inside though, my heart is full of terror. What if they lose the key? What if I can't get out? What if I get locked in here for ever? Incarceration is one of my greatest fears.

As they gathered in the Upper Room on the day of Pentecost the disciples were locked up. Physically they were locked into the Upper Room to avoid being captured by the authorities. But their incarceration was not just physical. It was emotional and spiritual. Jesus had gone, They had no idea what to do next. They were locked up by fear, by grief, by pain and confusion.

But then in wind and flame the spirit came, rushing through the house, setting them on fire. And they found that they were unlocked. They didn't just discover the courage to unlock the door. Now every part of them was set free.

The spirit unlocked their hearts to believe. Now they knew that Jesus was alive and that, through the Spirit, they could be in contemporary relationships with him. He would never let them go,

The spirit unlocked their gifts to serve. After the day of Pentecost they discovered gifts they never knew they had and spent the rest of their lives serving others as Jesus had served them. They healed the sick, fed the hungry, forgave sinners and built loving communities, all in the Spirit's power.

And the Spirit unlocked their mouths to proclaim. They found they could communicate the Good News of the Gospel to anyone, regardless of language. Peter stood up and, off the cuff, preached one of the greatest sermons of all time. And they spent the rest of their lives telling the world that Jesus was alive.

Over the past few months many of us have felt locked up. Endless tight restrictions have taken away basic freedoms and left us feeling incarcerated. We have spent week after week shut up in our houses.

Those rules are beginning to lift, life is starting to get back to normal. But Pentecost reminds us that it is not doors or government regulations that lock us in or out. The only thing that has the power truly to unlock us is the Holy Spirit. If this Pentecost we pray with all our hearts, 'Come Holy Spirit,' we too will be unlocked like the disciples.

The Spirit will unlock our hearts to believe. Because in his power we can know Jesus as a Saviour and a friend and live in each day in his company.

HEALTHY CHURCHES TRANSFORMING COMMUNITIES

The Spirit will unlock our gifts to serve. Because when we ask him, he will reveal to us gifts we never knew we had which we can use to reach out the hand of compassion to all who are in need.

The Spirit will unlock our mouths to proclaim. Because through him we can bear witness boldly to our faith and share with others the Good News that Jesus is alive and offers us a new start.

This Pentecost, our Diocese is launching the next phase of Vision 2026, a blueprint for growth as we emerge from this time of lockdown and entrust our future to the Lord. But plans and strategies are useless without prayer.

So above all pray 'Come Holy Spirit.' And allow the Holy Spirit of God to unlock your heart to believe, your gifts to serve and your mouth to proclaim Christ Jesus as Lord.

Bishop Philip North, Bishop of Burnley