



Day of Pentecost

MAY 24, 2026

At Pentecost, the risen Jesus breathes the Spirit into fearful disciples so that God's life becomes a many-voiced, one-bodied witness for the healing of the world.

FIRST READING

Acts 2:1-21

PSALM

Psalm 104:25-35,37

SECOND READING

1 Corinthians 12:3b-13

GOSPEL

John 20:19-23

Before You Hear the Readings

Pentecost is not only a celebration of spiritual energy or the birthday of Christian mission. It is the feast of God's nearness becoming public: breath entering bodies, speech crossing borders, gifts being given for the common good, and frightened disciples being sent into the world with Christ's peace.

The central tension is that the Holy Spirit is never under our control, yet the Spirit does not create chaos for its own sake. Wind and fire become proclamation. Many gifts become one body. Locked doors become a doorway into mission. Listen for the difference between religious enthusiasm and the deep, reconciling power of God.

The Lectionary Thread

Acts gives us the sound and scope of Pentecost: a gathered community is overtaken by wind, fire, and speech, and people from many nations hear God's mighty works in their own languages. The miracle is not that difference disappears, but that difference becomes a vessel of communion. The Spirit does not flatten the world into sameness; the Spirit makes understanding possible without requiring people to surrender their particular voices.

Psalm 104 widens the frame from Jerusalem to creation itself. The same divine breath that fills disciples also gives life to sea creatures, ships, Leviathan, mountains, and the ground beneath our feet. Pentecost is therefore not an isolated church event but a disclosure of how God has always been at work: sending forth Spirit, creating, sustaining, renewing.

First Corinthians brings the miracle into parish life. If the Spirit gives many gifts, those gifts are not badges of spiritual importance but manifestations given for the common good. The baptized are not an assortment of religious consumers; they are made to drink of one Spirit and to live as one body with many members.

John's Gospel gathers the whole movement into the room where fear has locked the doors. The risen Christ comes not as an idea but as the wounded and living Lord, breathes the Holy Spirit upon his friends, and sends them with peace and the ministry of forgiveness. Pentecost begins in wonder, expands into creation, orders the community in love, and comes to rest in the breath of Jesus making disciples agents of reconciliation.

The Readings Broken Open

FIRST READING

Acts places Pentecost within a Jewish festival already rich with memory and pilgrimage. Devout Jews from across the Mediterranean world are in Jerusalem, and Luke is careful to name them in all their geographic breadth. This is not yet a Gentile scene in the later missionary sense; it is Israel gathered from the nations, hearing the news of what God has done in Jesus.

The details are deliberately sensory: sound, wind, fire, voices, bewilderment. The Spirit arrives not as a private feeling but as an event that spills into public space. The disciples speak as the Spirit gives ability, and the crowd hears in native languages. Pentecost is often compared to

Babel, but the point is not simply reversal. At Babel, human pride fractures communion; at Pentecost, God creates communion without erasing plurality.

Peter's sermon interprets the event through the prophet Joel. What looks like disorder is actually promise fulfilled: God's Spirit poured upon all flesh. Sons and daughters, young and old, enslaved and free are drawn into prophetic speech. The Spirit is not reserved for one class, one gender, one age, or one religious elite. The public witness of the baptized begins with God's lavish refusal to keep divine life contained.

The sneer about new wine is also worth noticing. The Spirit's work can be mistaken, mocked, or dismissed by those who cannot imagine God acting outside expected forms. Peter does not answer mockery with defensiveness; he bears witness. Pentecost gives the parish not a script for domination but courage to interpret the world in light of God's promised mercy.

PSALM

Psalm 104 is a hymn of praise, but its praise is not vague. It is full of bodies, hunger, breath, food, seas, animals, ships, and the strange delight of Leviathan at play. The psalm teaches worshipers to pray Pentecost as creatures, not as disembodied spirits. Everything alive depends on God's open hand.

The key movement is breath. When God withdraws breath, creatures return to dust; when God sends forth Spirit, creation is renewed. The same Hebrew imagination that sees breath as life helps us hear Pentecost as an act of new creation. The Spirit who fills the house in Acts is not a religious novelty but the life-giving breath by which the world exists at all.

The psalm also contains a sharp longing for wickedness to cease. Prayed within Christian worship, this is not permission for contempt or vengeance. It is the cry of creation burdened by sin, violence, and disorder. To ask that wickedness be no more is to ask that God's renewing Spirit heal what damages life.

As prayer, this psalm gives the gathered assembly the proper posture for Pentecost: wonder, dependence, and praise. Before the Spirit sends disciples out, the psalm reminds them that they are first recipients of breath. Mission begins in gratitude.

EPISTLE

Paul writes to a gifted but divided Corinthian community. Spiritual gifts were present, but they had become entangled with status, rivalry, and comparison. Paul's correction is not to deny the gifts but to re-center them: varieties of gifts, services, and activities come from the same Spirit, the same Lord, the same God.

The essential test is confession and communion. To say that Jesus is Lord is already the work of the Holy Spirit, and any gift that serves Christ will move toward the common good. Wisdom, knowledge, faith, healing, powerful deeds, prophecy, tongues, and interpretation are not spiritual trophies. They are entrusted to particular members for the building up of all.

The body image matters because it refuses both uniformity and individualism. A body is not one undifferentiated mass, and it is not a collection of unrelated parts. In baptism, Jews and Greeks, enslaved and free, people marked by different histories and social locations are brought into one body and made to drink of one Spirit.

For a parish, this reading is both encouragement and examination. The Spirit is already giving what is needed, but those gifts must be discerned, honored, and ordered toward love. Pentecost asks not only, What gift have I received? but also, How is this gift being offered for the life of others?

GOSPEL

John brings us to Easter evening, behind locked doors. The disciples are afraid, and John's phrase about fear of the Jews must be heard with care: Jesus, the disciples, and the earliest believers are themselves Jewish. The fear here is of hostile authorities and dangerous circumstances, not a warrant for Christian suspicion toward Jewish people. The Gospel speaks into real fear without turning that fear into hatred.

The risen Jesus comes through locked doors and says peace. He shows his wounds, not to shame the disciples, but to reveal that the crucified one is truly the living Lord. His peace is not denial of suffering. It is the peace of the one who has passed through death and still stands among his friends with mercy.

Then Jesus breathes on them. John wants us to hear creation and new creation: as God breathed life into the first human creature, Christ breathes the Holy Spirit into a community being

remade. The sending of the disciples flows from the sending of the Son. They are not sent with their own authority, resentment, or cleverness, but with the breath and peace of Jesus.

The word about forgiving and retaining sins is difficult because it places real responsibility in human hands. It is not a license for control or spiritual coercion. It is a commission to be a reconciling community that tells the truth about sin and announces forgiveness where Christ gives it. To retain sin is sober work: naming what remains bound, harmful, and unhealed. The good news is that the risen Lord entrusts wounded disciples with his own ministry of peace.

Hearing It Fresh

If Pentecost is new to you, notice how physical the readings are. There is wind, fire, breath, speech, bodies, food, wounds, doors, and water implied in baptism. The Holy Spirit is not presented as a vague mood or a private religious feeling. The Spirit is God's own life moving through real people in real places.

Also notice that fear is not the end of the story. The disciples do not unlock the door by becoming brave enough on their own. Jesus comes to them, speaks peace, and breathes Spirit into them. That matters because Christian faith does not begin with having everything together. It begins with receiving the life of God and being drawn, gently and truthfully, into the work of reconciliation.

Going Deeper

Luke and John give us two distinct Pentecost-shaped accounts of the Spirit. In Acts, the Spirit descends after the resurrection and ascension in a public, audible, multilingual event. In John, the risen Jesus breathes the Spirit on Easter evening in an intimate scene of peace and sending. Rather than forcing the two accounts into a single timeline, Anglican interpretation can receive them liturgically: Acts shows the Spirit making witness public; John shows the Spirit as the breath of the risen Christ.

The biblical language of spirit, wind, and breath is richly layered. Hebrew ruach and Greek pneuma can carry all three meanings. Psalm 104, Genesis, Ezekiel's valley of dry bones, John's locked room, and Acts' rushing wind all belong to this larger scriptural pattern. The Spirit gives life where there was dust, movement where there was paralysis, speech where there was silence, and communion where there was fragmentation.

Pentecost also presses hard on questions of unity and difference. The miracle of languages in Acts does not create a sacred monoculture. People hear the gospel in the languages of home, memory, and belonging. This has deep implications for worship and mission: translation, contextual preaching, lay testimony, music, and local culture are not obstacles to the gospel when offered faithfully. They can become places where the Spirit is heard.

The Gospel's authority to forgive and retain sins has shaped Christian practices of reconciliation, pastoral care, discipline, and confession. In the Episcopal tradition, the Book of Common Prayer holds together corporate confession, absolution, and the call to amendment of life. The Baptismal Covenant likewise joins proclamation with practice: resisting evil, repenting, returning, seeking and serving Christ, and striving for justice and peace. Pentecost is not only ecstatic praise; it is the Spirit forming a people capable of truthful mercy.

For Young Listeners

Today we remember that Jesus gave his friends the Holy Spirit, which means God's own life and help with us. His friends were scared and hiding in a locked room, but Jesus came to them and said, "Peace be with you." Then he breathed on them and sent them to share God's love. On Pentecost, people from many places heard about God in their own languages. That shows us that God knows and loves every person, every family, and every voice. The Spirit helps us be brave, kind, and ready to forgive.