

CHICHESTER CATHEDRAL

Date:	24 May 2026
Service:	Eucharist, Pentecost
Preacher:	The Revd Canon Vanessa Baron, Treasurer

For the last week, we have been praying, 'O God the King of glory, you have exalted your only Son Jesus Christ with great triumph to your kingdom in heaven: we beseech you, leave us not comfortless, but send your Holy Spirit to strengthen us and exalt us to the place where our Saviour Christ is gone before.' Leave us not comfortless but send your Holy Spirit. Now the Day of Pentecost has arrived and I wonder, what do we expect?

The Bayeux Tapestry is due to arrive in England later this year and I, for one, am looking forward to seeing it. In one famous panel, Bishop Odo, one of William's henchmen, is shown holding a mace and striking a fleeing horse on the rear. The Latin text above the scene reads, 'Here Odo the bishop holding a club comforts/strengthens the boys!'

At the beginning of the Battle of Hastings, Harold's English forces had the high ground and used it to their advantage. William sent in his cavalry to try and turn the battle, but to his dismay they were forced back and began to run back down the hill away from the English. At that point Bishop Odo charged forward on his horse and, using his Bishop's mace, forced the Norman cavalry back up the hill by striking the horses on their rumps. His actions prevented the cavalry from retreating in disarray and was a decisive moment in the battle, leading to William's victory. Nor exactly the meaning of "comfort" as we understand it. Not a soft and tender experience, for

the Latin 'Con forte' literally means 'with strength'. Which is exactly what the Holy Spirit comes to do, 'He comes to strengthen us'.

The question comes, power for what, strengthened for what?

a) The analogy of the Christian life as a battle is not very popular nowadays. But the Gospel writers, especially John, recognise the reality of the struggle against sin, the world, the devil – a struggle that takes place both at a personal level and also against the forces of evil in a wider society. Satan is called the 'Father of lies' in John's Gospel - he encourages us to construct personal worlds where we tend to our own selfish, egotistical interests, telling us that these will lead to our happiness; instead falsehood, fear and suspicion abound. The results are dark indeed – injustice, aggression, isolation and ultimately death.

The Holy Spirit comes – like the sound of a mighty, rushing wind – to strengthen us so that we can continue to fight and not grow weary – to fight to love, for the truth, to forgive as we have been forgiven, to be open and generous. He comes with 'tongues of flame' to purify – he is God's Holy Spirit. This process is never easy – painful.

b) And he comes as the gift of the risen, ascended Christ – for he is the spirit of Christ. 'I will not leave you orphaned: I am coming to you' Jesus promised his disciples. Pentecost is inextricably linked to Easter. Jesus rose from the dead that first Easter Sunday morning because, to quote Archbishop Rowan Williams, his life of love, truth, compassion, reconciliation was rooted and grounded in the eternal life of God – it could never be extinguished. This is the life into which we have been baptised; the life which is sustained as we gather for Holy Communion. If we are 'in Christ' (to use St Paul's language) this is the life we share and the life we should display to the world. And so the Holy Spirit is the pledge of our inheritance – the sign that we too will not be separated from the love of God, that God's eternal life lives in us, giving us the 'hope of glory'.

c) Finally the Holy Spirit came to the disciples with the Gift of other languages. What was this about? The clue to the answer comes when Luke tells us that other people 'heard them speaking in their native language'. The Holy Spirit enabled the disciples to communicate to strangers and enables us to communicate, to build bridges with others in order to make Jesus Christ known in a way that they can understand.

The delight of the crowd that first Easter Sunday was that they heard the Gospel in their native language, so that it made sense to them, whoever they were, wherever they had come from.

Our identity is so closely linked to language. We know that from the tribal slang young people invent; from the pride people rightly take in regional accents and dialects. We all know that if we speak a foreign language it opens the doors for us. We can begin to understand another culture; to appreciate it when they have words for phenomena that we do not have a word for. To speak someone else's language also says that you value them and their cultural identity.

Jesus last commission to his disciples at his Ascension was that they should make disciples of 'all nations' – the Holy Spirit makes this possible. Making connections between people and communicating has always been the work of the Holy Spirit. It is the Spirit who prompts us to talk to God in prayer; it is the Spirit who leads us to worship; it is the Spirit who unites us to Christ and therefore to God the Father.

Application Our society is a fractured one and the church sadly can reflect this. But we are called to be radically different, through the power of the Holy Spirit to live out the resurrection life of Jesus Christ – lives where we look not to our own interests but those of others; lives that respect the dignity of other people and their identity; lives that are without fears, falsehood and prejudice, so that the barriers we create between people can be dismantled and

peace reign. Where we are willing to welcome and get to know people who are different to us – people who are not our age, not our class, not our nationality.

This is the work of the Holy Spirit but he requires our cooperation – it is a battle, but he comes to strengthen us.