

**Pentecost**  
**4/6/2006**

**Mark the Evangelist**

**Ezekiel 37:1-14**

**Acts 2:1-11**

**Psalm 104**

**John 15:26-27; 16:4b-15**

**The Spirit of life: Living in the way of love and trust.**

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CS Lewis is a name known to most of us. Of Irish descent, Lewis became an Oxford Don from 1926-56, and then a Cambridge Professor. He was a significant scholar in the field of English Literature. At Oxford Lewis slowly became a Christian. Not only did he embrace the faith, his clarity of thought, wit and skill meant that, through his writing and broadcasting the faith of many was influenced. Ironically the work for which Lewis is most well known today is his children's literature, *The Chronicles of Narnia*, the series that began with *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*.

Lewis was unmarried for most of his life. He and his brother shared a house and were looked after by a housekeeper. Children played a very small part in his life. Why did he turn to writing children's literature? It is possible a clue may be found in his decision to provide a home for some children evacuated from the cities during the Second War. After living such an ordered, bachelor's existence, the experience turned out to be a significant disruption. His life became **discombobulated**. But out of the deep confusion, born of this encounter with a new form of life, came an imaginative impulse and some of his most enduring work. *The Chronicles of Narnia* are not just children's stories; they are moral tales which are analogous to the life of faith.

We are here today to do two things. To celebrate the baptism of Edie, whose advent in Kate and Rob's family will present new challenges. In the best possible sense she may even be a disruptive influence, provoking new imaginative impulses in her artistic parents, and indeed, in the wider circle of their families.

And we are here today to celebrate the disruptive and empowering event, which was the coming of the Spirit at Pentecost. All the readings make it clear that the Spirit is a life-giving, energising power. Its origin is in God who by it gives life to all things. That is a way of saying, every living thing is not a creature of its own making, but lives from a context that is bigger than itself. And the Spirit is the power, which enables self-transcendence. This also means fulfilment of life is found through linking with the life source, enabling us to rise above ourselves. As Acts makes clear, the Spirit's action was sudden, disruptive and irresistible, provoking new impulses which enabled new speech, through which the first Christians shared their faith in bold and imaginative ways. The work of the Spirit may still do this, in the flash of insight, the uplifting impulse, or by means of artistic inspiration, which enables new connections, and shares the faith in fresh words and deeds. The Basis of Union uses that phrase - *fresh words and deeds* - at the end of Paragraph 11 which is devoted to Scholarly Interpreters. The phrase expresses a present and future hope for the Church and its scholars. The phrase was also used to name a book of writings by Davis McCaughey, who lived in the grace and strength and imagination of the Holy Spirit, and whose memory is evoked today with deepest love and respect.

In John the realm of the Spirit's activity is not the private recesses of the soul. The empowering presence of the Spirit (the Advocate) is what gives the disciples a voice. It works through human bodies, with hands and hearts and voices, which continue the ministry of Jesus by speaking for and demonstrating the love of God, which has the whole world as its focus. That means the work of the Spirit has relational and ethical outcomes in the world at large.

In the last forty years there have been two phenomena which people have seen as Spiritual. In the church there has been the charismatic movement, where people sought a spiritual high through ecstatic experiences. And in the world there has been a widespread interest in Spirituality, where people searched for enhanced personal experience through doing things with crystals or some form of meditation. In both cases analysis suggests that for many there has been more focus on the private self than on the communal and ethical health of society. In other words it is possible that self has triumphed over self-transcendence, because people prefer to live on their own terms, rather than enter a way that is endlessly open because it is grounded in God.

In this light we must pause over some difficult words in the middle of the John reading: *When the Spirit comes he will prove the world wrong about sin, righteousness and judgement.* What this means is that when the disciples go about their mission there will be a clash between what the Spirit provokes them to do, and the expectations people have about the way the world runs. The clash comes because the mission of the disciples has its source in love that reaches out to all the world. As on the day of Pentecost, no one was excluded but not all responded positively. Strangely, the call to turn towards a life lived in faith, hope and trust had its detractors. The clash John refers to is a manifestation of the fact that there is more than one way to think about God. The way of the world is a closed way, a way of control that resorts to legalism, victimisation, and threat to resist all challenges. The way of Jesus Christ is a way of community with God, built on trust and love that flows from Jesus' relationship with the God the Father. This way turns out to be counter-cultural and subversive of the world's power, which is why it inspires resistance and anger. But it is the way that leads to the deep joy born of finding ourselves at home.

The feast of Pentecost occurs at the time of the old Jewish Harvest festival. There is a lot of symbolic reference for us today. The time of gestation was over, the time of harvest and plenty, material and spiritual, was had arrived. The people joined together to praise God for the many, bountiful gifts they had received. And so do we. And they renewed their faith and trust in God and set out afresh on the way of life. And so do we, especially as we engage in the sacrament of Baptism. Praise God for the life, which has come to us as sheer gift. Let us choose again to live, not for ourselves, but for him who has loved us and called us to be his people, to the glory of God.