

**Acts 2:1-21**

**Psalm 104**

**Romans 8:14-17**

**John 14:8-17, 25-27**

---

One of our much favoured metaphors for the Holy Spirit is wind, the breath of God, moving over the face of the waters, blowing where it will, known by its effects, powerful yet elusive. One of our much favoured representations of wind, for the purposes of dignified liturgy, the education of children and the delight of the child in all of us, is the balloon. You may have noticed that your liturgists chose just that as one of our symbols for today. It is fitting for such a festival as Pentecost, as well as reminding us that we always worship in the presence and power of the life creating and sustaining Spirit of God.

What, though, if the balloons are filled with helium? Does that diminish or enhance the representation? As I pondered this, I found myself remembering the scene in the film *Mary Poppins* that accompanied the singing of the song “I love to laugh”. In this scene, a perfectly normal family ritual of sitting at table is completely transformed as the participants join in laughing to the point where they are lifted, chair and all, up to the ceiling, where they float around laughing just for the sheer joy of it.

Might it be a bit like that for us?

Might there be something to learn from imagining the Holy Spirit as helium that fills us to the point of floating, Chagall like, balloon like, around the ceiling of our lives? Could life really be meant to be so enjoyable?

Could God really be so playful?

Imagine the sense of lightness – all those burdens of responsibility, care, disappointment, failure, expectation, deadlines left on the floor as you dare to let yourself be floated up.

Imagine the sense of unlimited possibility. You too could be blown wherever. Or pushed wherever. Bumping alongside who knows whom. Bouncing off one another. Hanging about having fun. Hanging about being community. Of course there’s also that sudden flush of anxious vulnerability when you think about your loss of control, about how vulnerable you are, about how stuck you could get, about how much you’d need to just let go and be part of it, about having no choice but to be communal, to be neighbour to whoever floats into you.

But there is also an incredible sense of security. No-one in this community of floating balloons can put a pin in you. No-one can put you down when you’re full of helium, even if they wanted to, which of course they don’t. So all in all, it’s actually a very safe, secure place in a contradictory sort of way. Paradoxically, when you let go the things that you put in place to keep yourself secure, the freedom is even more reassuring than all those carefully constructed protective strategies. When you leave your pins at the door and just let yourself go with the Spirit, you know the health and safety measures are focussed on what really matters. You can relax, be at peace, be yourself, just get on with being the balloon you were made to be. Helium casts out all fear. Look at how you glow as the Spirit fills you full. Look at how everyone delights in you as the Spirit brings you to life.

Another thing about floating around at ceiling level is the perspective it gives you. You can see so much more. When you're not down there being the centre of your life, you can see that there's all sorts of other things happening. All sorts of other people dealing with the same sort of stuff that takes up so much of your attention when you let the helium out and get back to the real world. All sorts of people dealing with the same stuff, but without the resources you have to deal with it. All sorts of people dealing with way worse stuff. All sorts of people dealing with stuff alone. All sorts of people unable to manage much more. All sorts of people suffering through no fault of their own. All sorts of people stuck with self-inflicted suffering they feel powerless to address. All sorts of people doing really well for themselves. All sorts of people doing really well for themselves at the expense of others. All sorts of people using others to hide from their own pain or anger or inadequacy or fear. All sorts of people living out of fear. All sorts of people living with no rhyme or reason.

So what do we do with that? How can we go on floating around the ceiling, looking and feeling wonderful, with all that going on? Talk about being too heavenly minded to be any earthly use. But our compassion will not let us ignore this world the Spirit has enabled us to see. Our temptation is to let out our own helium and go and join these people to help them.

Yet without the Spirit we are simply in the same boat as they are. We are back to seeing only what we can see alone, though we may be driven by the memory of what the Spirit showed us. The danger is that all too quickly it will be back to being all about us again, even though we might be doing all sorts of good. We could end up being as blindly self-absorbed in our caring for the other as we were in our self care. We could end up burning out. And the people we helped would never have seen what sent us to them in the first place.

When you take a helium filled balloon and hold it, you can feel the energy pushing against you. You can feel the power waiting to break free. So what might it be like if you could be a helium balloon on the ground? What if you allowed the needs of your neighbourhood, or even of just one neighbour, to hold you where they are. Imagine all that energy being harnessed to the task of caring. Imagine what you could offer as a fully inflated person of the helium Spirit, walking the earth, being alongside the uninflated, doing all you can to get some Spirit into them. Doing all you can to assist *the* Spirit to have influence in their situation, without actually letting the Spirit in you go. Maintaining your Spirit induced glow to encourage and reassure and give hope in the face of hopelessness. Being in the world but not of the world.

Now, of course, the risks are real. Just because you look nice doesn't mean no-one will put a pin in you. Just because you're being nice doesn't mean no-one will try to deflate you. Indeed, the very person you do the most for may be the one who will want to test you to the very limit, to prove to themselves that their reality is the only reality, to ensure they don't invest in a hope that can be destroyed with the prick of a pin. And unless we are fearless enough to allow that to happen, they will never see that the hope is real because the Spirit fills us again, patching our wounds and inflating us to life again, proclaiming that not even a pin can triumph over the balloons of God.

On this day of Pentecost we celebrate the gift of the Holy Spirit to us, the church of God, with balloons. I pray that you may be filled to floating with the joy the Spirit brings.

\*\*\*