

# Ascension and Pentecost

## Windrush God: affirming diversity

### AIM

Inviting an exploration of the Pentecost event (Acts 2:1-13) as an affirmation of the Christian community as a welcoming and diverse space for all and the implications for the content of our prayers.

### INTRODUCTION

#### Let me tell you.....

In 2005 the United Reformed Church openly declared itself a multicultural church and pledged its commitment to empowering the whole church towards just, inclusive and transforming mission and ministry. Our gathering of over 361 people of all ages, ethnicities and cultures on Saturday December 5<sup>th</sup> at Carrs Lane URC to celebrate that WE are multicultural affirms this. It was a contemporary Pentecost experience of God's spirit "moving just like a magnet" - as they sing in the Caribbean. One person who was present used these words to capture the gathering: "the urc rocks". Another reported the following: "As I prepared for the long journey south from Darlington to Birmingham, I had no idea what to expect when I got there. Fortunately, for my two friends and me, we were not disappointed. The church was full of people, old, young, very young, of all nationalities, buzzing with love, excitement and energy."

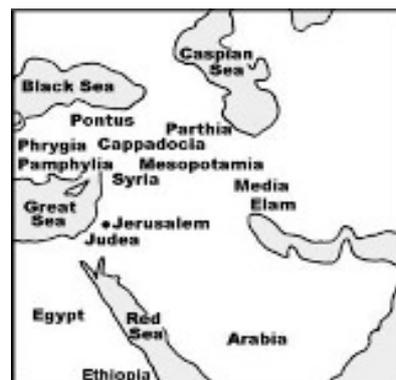
The URC is a MULTICULTURAL Church committed to empowering all towards just, inclusive, renewing and transforming mission and ministry.

- Were you at this or similar event? What did it feel like?

### REFLECTION

#### Carnival-Like Atmosphere...As the Story goes

Celebration was in the air. It was just the ideal day for multiculturalism. People swarmed in from all over the place. Jerusalem, at the feast of Pentecost, was filled with people with strange foreign names from cities far off: as far as Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and Libya, Pontus and Asia. There were Parthians, Medes, Elamites, Cretans and Arabs, among the many others. According to Luke's geography (his known world) this was indeed a representative gathering of "every nation under heaven". There were young, old, rich, poor, men and women. The guest list would have included the immigrants, refugees and non-citizens, orphaned and widowed, the homeless and those on the margins. People were invited for the festival regardless of religion, race, gender, status or age. The human-made barriers that divided throughout the year were removed for the day of celebration.



#### All Together in One Place...

The lonely little group of men and women, friends of Jesus "all together in one place" would never have imagined that the Spirit would grab hold of and lead them into the "dance of their lives". This *con-spiracy*, (from con-spire i.e. with breath or breathing together) as one writer puts it, resulted in about three thousand of that crowd (including the lonely little group) having their lives radically transformed. One cannot read or hear the

# Ascension and Pentecost

## Windrush God: affirming diversity

narrative without appreciating its radical inclusiveness. The wild, free, strange and wonderful *wind-rush* of the Spirit of God pulled down the barriers and evoked a variety and multi-ethnic group of people to begin “breathing together” and “fired up” for the adventure of their lives.

### The Varied Bouquet of Peoples

The varied bouquet of peoples with the orchestrated symphony of languages is not without significance. “God does not speak only one language” (Koyama). Here is the wind-rush God re-directing the Babel trajectory of homogenisation and the enforcing of a petrifying uniformity. With hurricane force wind and flaming tongues, God’s “YES” to the diversities of identity, taste, style, culture, ideology and vision is loud and clear. Indeed, “culture shapes the human voice that answers the voice of Christ” (WCC:1973).



### Our Wind-rush God

Our wind-rush God is not in the business of creating a community of one colour or one flavour. Diversity should be received as a gift from God. Diversity in terms of accent, culture, race or ethnicity is not something to fear; it is something to appreciate about God. In God’s landscape all the colours are recognized and vibrant, enhancing each other, dull without the other, independent and interdependent. Cultural and other differences should not lock us into divided categories. For while the Spirit of the wind-rush God affirms the identity of each, She binds us together in a common community. We are more connected than we imagine. That’s good news then, now and always. You and I don’t have to pretend to be someone we are not, to be a part of the Christian community. We are already included in God’s landscape.

### Living Signs

Are we ready to be signs of God’s inclusive love across culture, race, class, gender, age and all other divides? Can we learn to embrace (not just talk about) a wider diversity of human experience in the URC? Our wind-rush God in Christ is waiting expectantly to power up a transforming storm in our lives.

### We are our Prayers

Pentecost sends some important signals for a praying community – especially the content of our prayers:

- God in Christ has no boundary of ethnicity, culture or language. The message of God’s expansive love came in different tongues, yet was understood by all. Our prayers should manifest the expansive nature of such love.
- The Pentecost story affirms that the Good News should be translated into words that we can hear, into a message that speaks to the cultures to which we belong—to young and old, to rich and poor, to ethnicities and cultures of the world, to those who find a home across the diversity of gender and sexuality, and to those of all abilities.
- With this breadth comes a commitment to walk responsibly and humbly as we recall words such as: *peace be with you; receive the Holy Spirit*

# Ascension and Pentecost

## Windrush God: affirming diversity

- Here is God's Spirit poured out for all – the whole inhabited world as the Spirit opening God's message of abundant life to all. Thus Pentecost asks us to pray for and work towards a church for all people; to be open to religious experiences which may be different from my own. The Spirit of God loves diversity.

### FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

#### Let's think about it.....

- What are the Pentecost stories in the life of your church? Share them.
- Share experiences of trying to tell of your faith to someone who did not believe and who responded as if you were speaking a foreign language. Then share experiences when the person you were conveying your faith to was able to understand you in their own "language." What do you think made the difference?
- "WE believe in the Holy Spirit"! WE are a multicultural church! How do we live these declarations? Reflect on this.
- Read a portion of scripture, learn a phrase or pray in a different language or a variety of languages. Why not invite someone who speaks another language to your group.

#### To do together

- based on this material about the content of our prayer, write a Pentecost prayer of intercession.

#### Prayer

Holy Spirit, breadth of God,  
Giver of the vital breadth of life;  
You who draw us together in all our variety  
to sing praises of thankfulness  
break into our lives and midst  
and infuse your breath  
on words that roll off our tongues and minds.  
Touch our hearts, minds and spirits  
with the transforming power of your generous grace  
pouring in us your vibrant love,  
propelling us to lives powered up with love.  
This we ask in the name of he  
who embodied that love to the fullest,  
Jesus, the one who saves. Amen



[Sing the chorus: "spirit of the living God" (*Rejoice & Sing*, 308)]

#### EVALUATION

Please try to answer these questions for yourself and for others who will use this material:

1. What was the most helpful thing?
2. What was the least helpful thing?
3. What would you like to try now?

# Ascension and Pentecost



## Windrush God: affirming diversity

### THE NEXT STEP

If you want more seasonal materials please revisit the website

### Acknowledgements

This material has been prepared by Michael Jaggesar who has given permission for it to be used in the Vision4life process.

### HOW TO FEEDBACK TO VISION4LIFE?

If you wish to offer any feedback – brickbats and bouquets are equally welcome! – you can do so in various ways.

You can email the Vision4Life steering group about general or website V4L issues via the website or at [admin@vision4life.org.uk](mailto:admin@vision4life.org.uk)

If you have comments and particularly contributions to the prayer year, you can email the V4L prayer year coordinator via [prayer@vision4life.org.uk](mailto:prayer@vision4life.org.uk)

If you want to make contributions or ask questions about other V4L years you can email:

Year 3 – Transformed for Evangelism: [evangelism@vision4life.org.uk](mailto:evangelism@vision4life.org.uk)