



# Sunday Reflection

## Season of Easter

in the Charges of St Margarets, Renfrew  
& St Johns, Johnstone



For Sunday 23 May 2021

# Pentecost

Pentecost marks both Eastertide's conclusion and the Church's birth. Resurrection is not limited to Jesus bursting from the tomb; it lives in each of us as together we step outside the church doors to be God's agents, the Gospel, in the world.

## Reflection for this week's Gospel

**"When the Spirit of truth comes, s/he will guide you into all the truth." *John 16:13***

### An Illustration to set the scene

In a popular British television series, people bring battered treasured heirlooms to a repair shop run by restoration experts.

During each item's refurbishment, we learn its story and significance.

Skilfully, the craftspeople transform each broken object, retaining its history, its essential nature, but giving it new life, confirming and refreshing its relationship with its owners.

In one episode a man brought the remains of a barber's pole, explaining that when his father moved from Cyprus to London in the 1950s, all he possessed was his hairdressing skill and a little English.

The pole's red and white stripes were a universal language signalling for centuries a barber's shop. With the sign on the

shopfront and his scissors he made a new life in London, becoming a vital member of the local community.

Someone else carried in the decrepit remains of a Victorian writing slope. Unearthed when clearing out his deceased sister's house, inside he discovered documents telling the truth about his adoption, his family and his relationship with his sister. Deftly restored into an object of beauty and functionality, it was offered back to him, repurposed as a treasure chest to contain those papers vital to his identity.

### **Looking at the teaching of the Gospel**

Today's Gospel is taken from farewell discourse in John's Gospel, where Jesus prepares his disciples for the events of Holy Week and their future ministries.

It comprises the last three of the five "*Paraclete sayings*", "*Paraclete*" being translated as "*advocate*" by the NRSV translation of the Bible, although the valid use of such terms as "counsellor", "comforter" or "helper" by other versions hints at the richness of the original Greek word.

While the portrayal of the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, is a complex and distinctive feature of John's Gospel, in the context of Pentecost two aspects stand out.

First, the Advocate, the "Spirit of Truth", provides continuity with the presence of Jesus, who earlier in this discourse (John 14:6) described himself as the way, the truth and the life. This relationship between Advocate and Son ensures that post-ascension the disciples will not be bereft of God's presence – as today's Acts reading makes clear. Through the Advocate the revelation of the incarnation continues.

Second, the Advocate comes as teacher and witness. The sin of the world, those who stand in opposition to Jesus, will be exposed by the Advocate (John 16:7-11).

This sin is unbelief in Jesus, leading to a skewed form of justice that prioritises powerful people over those who are weak. Having taught what is wrong with the world, this Spirit of truth will proceed to teach God's true ways (John 16:12-13).

But while witnessing to the truth of Jesus' ministry, the Advocate also teaches how his words and deeds apply to situations that Christian communities will encounter in the future.

This is the creative process of story and interpretation, history and theology, that allows the Church to grow and move forward, to answer the question the Spirit continually asks: "What is the meaning of Jesus Christ today?"

### **How can we reflect on the application to our lives?**

The barber's pole and its universal symbolism can help us understand how each of the inhabitants of Jerusalem hears God's word in their own tongue.

The pole's red stripes might lead us to consider the liturgical colour for Pentecost, not white or gold.

While red recalls the Spirit's flames igniting the disciples' confidence, it also symbolises the profound sacrifices that are required of us all for the Church to be a truthful instrument of God's growing kingdom.

The battered writing slope might be more appropriate in response to the Gospel: what was lost and broken is restored to contain deep truths. Both it, and its owner, were transformed, yet retained their essential natures. The refashioned box is repurposed and through its new life offers fresh hope to those for whom it has meaning.

In closing Eastertide, Pentecost celebrates the Church's birth.

While acknowledging the past it surges forward, offering us, through the Spirit, tools to tell God's truth, to be the Gospel in the world.

Sometimes that requires learning to communicate using specific cultural language; sometimes all we need do is rely on the universal language of God's love.

**"When the Spirit of truth comes, s/he will guide you into all the truth." *John 16:13***

Please share your response to this reflection to [Rector@SECStJohnStMargaret.org.uk](mailto:Rector@SECStJohnStMargaret.org.uk) – did anything speak to you? Did you feel challenged, angered, consoled by something in the words? How did God's spirit move you as you read it? Have you shared the words with someone else? Is this a worthwhile thing to make available to folk whilst we cannot meet for corporate worship to share in word and sacrament? What are your thoughts?

**[www.SECStJohnStMargaret.org.uk](http://www.SECStJohnStMargaret.org.uk)**