Holy Spirit, would you take these words and give to each of us according to our need. Amen.

On Thursday I had my first covid vaccine, after waiting patiently for months, watching the age go down and down until it was finally my turn. And after it was done, the nurse gave me two stickers… ‘Give the reverend an extra sticker’, she said, chuckling, ‘she needs to share this good news with her church!’ I said how, actually, I was the one of the few who had still been waiting, and her reply was, ‘Oh how lovely, so they got to share their good news with you too!’

This is Pentecost, for me. Joy that bubbles over, that cannot be contained, that does not want to be contained, that needs to be shared. Joy in the form of the Holy Spirit that fills us so completely with love and passion and enthusiasm that we cannot help but go out and show what it is like to live a life filled with God. There’s something so attractive and alluring about this, as we heard in our reading from Acts. The Holy Spirit filled the disciples and gave them the ability to speak in other languages, and the people from every nation who were there gathered to hear them.

Pentecost is often called the birth of the church, the moment when the same spirit who hovered over the waters of creation in Genesis, comes and is poured out on God’s people and shows that God’s blessing is for everyone. But I think it’s more along the lines of Pentecost being the broadening of the church, the way in which God truly shows that the good news of Jesus, the salvation and hope that we have, is for everyone. The Spirit is present in the Church as Christ’s gift to us. The gift that the disciples had been promised and had been waiting for. So how are we to receive this gift of the Spirit of truth, and what do we think we need to hear now, for our church, today? Where is the Spirit nudging us, subtly or not-so-subtly, to pay attention, to notice, to make Christ visible?

As a church, we’re focussing on listening at the moment, listening to God and noticing things and people around us. Our listening document says, ‘We can make a difference to the community and to individuals, if we allow ourselves to be guided by the Holy Spirit.’ But how? The reading from Acts shows the Holy Spirit as active, as empowering the disciples immediately, and Peter does just this, getting up and preaching to all who were there, baptising people and growing the church in an instant. What we are hoping or trying to do with listening is to slow down a bit, be attentive to what is happening in our lives, notice conversations or people that seem to particularly strike us, and then share this with one another to see if we can discern who God is calling us to be now, in this place, as we emerge from lockdown.

It’s an opportunity to not just do things because we always have, but because this is what we believe we are called to be doing with our community now. It’s less about us putting ourselves in the roles of the disciples, and more about us being the people in the crowd, the ones who hear the voice of God in our own language, in ways and words that our ears are tuned to pick up.

And what we hope to achieve with this listening is a Church which is more aligned with God’s longing for the community and world. A church who knows what the Holy Spirit is saying to us and which is determined to be a thoughtful and attentive blessing to the world we are part of. A church that follows where Christ leads us in confidence and with joy. I wasn’t really sure how to explain this further, until I remembered a priest from years ago saying to me, Cara, if you want to describe what the Holy Spirit means to you, you have to use examples, you have to share your Holy Spirit moments.

And so, I thought I’d share what I have noticed recently, the conversations that have struck me most, and I wonder if perhaps anyone else has noticed something similar?

I’ve noticed a huge joy as people come back together and see each other again, joy that is infectious and makes those around them smile too. And I’ve noticed that in our regrouping and regathering, there is the sadness of people we miss, people who have died and who we will not hug again in this life. Our reunions are both joyful and bittersweet, and there is pain even though we can comfort one another a little more now. Joy and love being gifts of the spirit.

I’ve noticed that there is uncertainty and anxiety even as people delight in feeling ‘normal.’ That going to the pub, cinema, on holiday or even inside someone else’s house, is as disconcerting as it is enjoyable. We haven’t done these things for so long that we are now having to relearn how to act in these situations, and we also have to be gentle with people who are at different stages of readiness to do these things than we are, and know that it will take time and patience. Patience, gentleness and kindness being gifts of the spirit.

I’ve noticed that, now that the last crisis with covid seems over, at least in this country, people are exhausted and in need of rest. That we might only just be starting to realise how the pandemic affected our mental health and that we are going to have to be more understanding, more encouraging in order to take away some of the stigma. And that as a society, resources are dangerously thin and stretched when it comes to mental health support, and we need to invest in this with overt generosity. Generosity being a gift of the spirit.

And I’ve noticed that it is the little things that make the biggest difference. Being treated with dignity, seeing someone who cares for you, taking time to call someone, putting a date in the diary, those acts of kindness, small or not so small, that make you know that someone is thinking of you, enjoying the sunshine and the flowers or dancing in the rain… whatever it is that makes you smile, that gives you a feeling of peace that passes all understanding, that allows joy to bubble up, even in the smallest of things. Peace, kindness and joy being gifts of the spirit.

My holy spirit moments have come in the receiving of a vaccine and in being told to share that good news. In having the privilege of baptising two little girls last week and being aware just how precious it is to be able to welcome them and their friends and family here in church once more. And in being invited to listen to people’s stories and know that God is with us in that moment, in that conversation. This week, as part of listening to God, be attentive to *your* Holy Spirit moments. Moments where God is so tangible and so very present, whether that comes out in joyful tumbling or healing comfort. The Holy Spirit is God’s gift to us, given in a language that we can understand. So pause, be still, breathe, and listen.

Amen.