

Peace First: What Pentecost Teaches Me About Gifts and Grace



By **Revd Mark Ackford** on 20/05/2026



This Sunday is the Feast of Pentecost and when I dwell in the words of Acts 2: 1-21 and John 20: 19-23 the readings which will be read in Church on that day, the day that we celebrate the birthday of the church and God's gift to Jesus' disciples and us of the Holy Spirit, the first thing that stands out to me is not power, but tenderness.

In John, the disciples are behind locked doors, frozen with fear, and Jesus steps into the room with a simple greeting: "Peace be with you." He does not scold them or tell them to pull themselves together. He meets them gently, shows them his wounds, and breathes the Holy Spirit on them. Then in Acts, that same Spirit comes with wind and fire, and what was hidden suddenly becomes bold and public. I love the way these passages sit together. They remind me that God often meets us gently before he sends us out bravely. The Spirit does not begin with performance. It begins with peace.

That changes the way I think about gifts and talents too. In Acts 2, one of the clearest signs of Pentecost is that people hear the good news in their own language. God's power shows up through understanding. The miracle is not just spectacle. It is connection. It makes me think that the gifts God gives us are usually meant less to make us look impressive and more to help someone else hear hope clearly. A gift might be a skill, a kind word, a listening ear, practical help, generosity, or simply being steady when someone else is struggling. The Spirit does not throw away our ordinary abilities; he uses them. What we already have can become grace in action when we place it in Christ's hands.

Peter then quotes Joel: "I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh." I find that deeply encouraging. God does not save his Spirit for the polished, the confident, or the naturally impressive. The Spirit is poured out on sons and daughters, young and old, servant and leader alike. That matters in a world that often values what is loud, visible, and successful. Some of the holiest gifts are quiet ones: patience, hospitality, compassion, faithfulness, kindness, and prayer. These readings push me to ask a better question. Not, "Is my gift impressive?" but, "Have I surrendered it?" If the Spirit is truly given to all, then even the smallest offering can have a real place in God's purposes.

John 20 also reminds me that gifts grow best in an atmosphere of peace. Jesus says, "Peace be with you," before he sends the disciples, and after breathing the Spirit on them he speaks about forgiveness. That order feels important. Gifts are not meant to flow from anxiety, ego, or self-protection, but from hearts that are being healed by Christ. Talent without love can turn into self-display. Ability without humility can do more harm than good. But when Jesus shapes our inner life, even simple acts can carry his presence. In the end, the beauty of a gift is not just how striking it is, but whether it reflects the character of Jesus.

These passages also remind me that gifts are never just for us. In Acts, the disciples are together when the Spirit comes, and what they receive immediately overflows toward other people. That feels like an important reminder. Whatever we have has been entrusted to us for the sake of community and for the world God loves. A meal made for someone, a visit to a lonely person, a faithful prayer, wise leadership, practical service, or a timely word may not look dramatic, but none of it is wasted in the kingdom of God. The Spirit has always loved working through ordinary lives to make God's love visible.

So, I come away from these readings with both gratitude and surrender. Gratitude, because every good thing in us is first a gift of grace. Surrender, because gifts become fruitful when they are offered back to God. We may not have the most dramatic talent, but we can still bring a willing heart. And that is enough for the Spirit to work with. Pentecost reminds me that God still enters fearful places, still speaks peace, and still sends ordinary people out with holy purpose. Whatever gifts and talents we have, may they become instruments of peace, love, and hope in the hands of Christ.