



The Church of England
in Essex and East London

Diocese of Chelmsford

Earth, Wind, Fire and Water

Pentecost, 24 May 2026

Acts 2:1-21, John 7:37-39

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What is the world made of? It was a big question in ancient philosophy. It still is. Thales said the world was made of water, Anaxamines said it was made of wind, Heraclitus said it was made of fire. The whole thing is weirder than we usually realise. I'm not going to solve anything today, but I want to say that Pentecost is a good day to have our minds blown a little bit, to realise there is more to this world than our everyday common sense might suggest. There are unseen elements interacting with us all the time.

By the time Jesus was born, people were pretty much agreed: the universe was made of earth, wind, fire and water. And I think it's not coincidental that in the Pentecost story, all four of these elements are given new meaning when they are shot through with the Holy Spirit.

Let's start with **wind**. Actually, in Hebrew the same word means "wind" and "spirit." On the day of Pentecost, there was a sound like a mighty rushing wind, even though the doors and windows were closed and the house was adequately draft-proofed. Wind is invisible – as Jesus once commented, you can't see where it is, but you can see where it's been. Wind is majestic. Wind is power on an ocean, either taking you where you need to go or capsizing you altogether. Wind is uncontrollable. The Spirit is all of those things – power for good, dangerous to oppose, unpredictable. But remember, the Spirit is the Spirit of Jesus so although the Spirit is never domesticated, the Spirit is never unloving. When I settle into a rut and think my tomorrow is like my yesterday, I need the Spirit to blow across me and give me a new adventure. That's what we come to church for, isn't it? I mean, isn't it? To be freshened and given a new adventure? Letting the wind of the Spirit blow across us is not business as usual, and if you've been following our 100 days of prayer, you'll know that this week's theme is waiting, as the disciples waited at Pentecost, expectant for change yet not knowing what that change would require of them. God wants to catch your attention. Can you hear the Wind blowing?

Then there's **fire**. Tongues of fire on each of the disciples. It must have been terrifying to have your head on fire – but the disciples soon discovered that this fire was like the burning bush – it burnt without harming. What a good picture of the Holy Spirit. This world is charged with the glory of God. You are charged with the glory of God. God wants to fill you and bless you and burn in you with passion, but God doesn't want to consume you and turn you or anyone else into dust and ashes so that all that is left is the fire – no, God wants to burn away what is not authentic and leave the real you behind, blazing with the Spirit's glory. God wants to catch your attention, as he did with Moses at the burning bush. Can you feel the crackle of the fire on your face? Don't just sit at the holy fire of God toasting marshmallows.

Fire warms – drawing us together.

Fire refines – burning away what doesn't belong.

Fire ignites – sending us out with purpose.

I'm recording this sermon the day after the local elections, with the Prime Minister's position precarious. There is plenty of heat around, isn't there. But not all of it is holy. Although the Spirit's fire may well stir up anger at injustice, it is:

- Not the fire of destructive outrage, but of **love that refuses to give up**.
- Not the fire of division, but of **passion for justice and mercy together**.
- Not the fire that consumes others, but the one that **transforms us first**.

Someday, after we have mastered the winds, the waves and combustion, will we let God in us harness energies of love?

OK, that's wind and fire. Now, **water**: in our Gospel reading, Jesus says the Holy Spirit will be like water in two senses: first, when we are thirsty, longing, unsatisfied, the Spirit will be water **for** us, and will quench our thirst, give lasting satisfaction and settled joy. But second, the Spirit will be like a spring of living water **from** us, flowing from our deepest being and bringing life and joy to our neighbours. Which are you praying for, this Pentecost – the water of the Spirit to satisfy your soul, or the water of the Spirit welling up joyfully from within you and giving life to those around you? Both are the promise of Jesus. Can you taste the living water? Can you feel the water flow from your soul like a stream in the desert?

Wind, fire and water. The Spirit is blowing, flaming and flowing. Stick your face into the breeze, take a deep drink of grace, and let your heart catch fire with hope. And you're probably saying "Andy, what about the earth? Where's the earth in the Pentecost story?"

My sisters and brothers, **YOU ARE THE EARTH**. You are clay. But God wants to touch you by the wind and fire and water of the Spirit. When we let the world around us define us – as a doctor or a train driver or a retired person or whatever – we lose the wonder that we are formed by God and blown upon and set on fire and indwelt by the Spirit and satisfied by living water and irrigating East London and Essex. Come holy God, fill the hearts of your people, kindle in us the fire of your love. Send forth your Spirit and we will be recreated, and you will restore the face of the earth.

So may you be:

- **Wind-blown enough** to trust God beyond your preferences,
- **Thirst-quenched enough** to be deeply satisfied in God and become a source of life-giving water to those around you,
- **Fire-lit enough** to love boldly in a dark, cold world. Amen