

Morning Service Sunday 31st May 2026 – led by Revd. John Steele.



When John comes to lead our worship, we know we are in for a lively session. But firing off party poppers in church during the Service might have seemed a risky choice – particularly with our Chief Elf sitting in the back row. We loved it! And it was all in a good cause, as an illustration of Life in the Spirit as part of Trinity Sunday.



John wanted us to think about party poppers. We usually saw them at celebrations: small containers filled with paper and a little charge, waiting to burst into colour and movement. But a party popper did nothing until someone pulled the string. Its potential remained hidden until it was released. That image helped us think about our own lives. God's Spirit was within us—not paper, but God's power, life, and energy. Just as a party popper was released at the right moment, God wanted to release us into the world with His love, truth, and faith for the good of others. That was part of why we gathered together: to be renewed for the work God had given us.

Even in a quiet service (*and this one was far from quiet!*), God was at work through each person present. He worked through our personalities, our quietness, our smiles, our friendship, and the care we showed to others. It might not always look dramatic, but God was making a difference in the world through us.

A party popper was finished once it had been fired, but when God released His power through us, He did not leave us empty—He refilled us. That was the remarkable difference.

- The more we gave, the more God filled us again.
- When we felt exhausted, God gave courage, strength, and energy.
- When we felt like giving up, He reminded us that we were part of His plan for what needed to change in the world.

There were certainly times when we felt ready to pack it all in, and then suddenly we'd remember that God was still at work and that our lives mattered in His purposes. So, we were not to be "party poopers"—people who brought gloom where there should be joy. Instead, we should trust God's Spirit to make a difference in our lives and trust Him to make a difference in the lives of others through us.



When God's Spirit was let loose, things changed. God did not leave the world as it was; He brought life, movement, and transformation. We might prefer things to stay comfortable and familiar, but God's Spirit called us to live with His life within us.

Of course, after we'd fired off the party poppers, somebody would have to clean up! But John said that God was happy with a mess as part of change in our lives.

Life in the Spirit

John had been passing through St. Albans the other day when he'd noticed a piece of graffiti on a wall: "Life's a bitch." At first, he'd walked past it. But later he'd found himself thinking about it again. The phrase had been blunt, memorable, and impossible to ignore. The word itself had more than one meaning. It could refer literally to a female animal, but in common speech it was also used to describe something harsh, painful, or deeply unpleasant. Whatever its origin, the statement resonated because many of us had known moments when life felt joyless, empty, or unbearably hard. We too, at times, might have been tempted to say that life offered little pleasure, little meaning, and little hope.

That feeling of inner struggle connected with the words of **Paul in Romans 7**. He described a reality many people recognised: the painful gap between what we wanted to do and what we actually did. Paul had spoken of wanting to do good yet finding himself doing the very things he hated. His cry was one of frustration, helplessness, and sorrow. His words reminded us that human life often felt like a battleground. We could find ourselves in conflict with our own desires, habits, and weaknesses. Left to ourselves, we did not become better; often we simply became more aware of how powerless we

were to change. Paul's message was that we were not meant to fight this battle alone. What we could not overcome by our own strength, God could begin to change in us through the Holy Spirit.

Much of Christian life began with the recognition that willpower alone was not enough. We might know what was right. We might even long to do it. But still we found ourselves trapped in familiar patterns.

- We trusted our own wisdom.
- We pleased ourselves.
- We took a few steps forward, only to slip back again.
- We knew the good, yet struggled to live it consistently.

Paul had known this well through the burden of rules and regulations. But the Christian faith was not simply about trying harder. It was about being united with Christ and receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit, who brought real transformation.

At Pentecost, the Church celebrated the coming of the Holy Spirit with wind, fire, and power. That moment marked not just the birth of the Church, but the beginning of a new kind of life for believers. Those first Christians had been changed. They became new people, and God had given them strength for what he called them to do. The same was true for us. When the Spirit of God lived within us, we were no longer ruled by guilt or by the fear that we were cut off from God. We might still know weakness, uncertainty, and even fear, but we were not abandoned. We were held by God, and he continued his work within us. The point was not that we improved ourselves by our own efforts. Rather, we lived faithfully before God and allowed his Spirit to reshape our lives. Change came not through self-reliance, but through grace.

One theologian had expressed it by saying that the gift of the Holy Spirit closed the final gap between the life of God and our own lives. Though difficult to grasp, the truth was simple: when we placed ourselves in God's hands and admitted our weakness, God began to do in us what we could never do for ourselves. That was why the message did not end with despair. Even when the world looked broken and troubling, God's Spirit was still at work. His purposes were still moving forward, and his kingdom was still coming.



John returned to the words on the wall: *"Life's a bitch."* On one level, they expressed a truth many people felt in moments of pain. But they were not the final word. For those who trusted God, suffering and struggle did not have the last say. God gave joy in place of despair, peace in place of turmoil, comfort in place of bitterness, and strength for the life he called us to live.

Might we trust him enough to let his Spirit change us, sustain us, and lead us into life.

And this week somebody remembered without any prompting that she had to light the candles!