

# All of Us in Wonderland

Going down  
the rabbit hole  
into God's  
reign of love



A Liturgical Guide for a six-week Pentecost Season  
by Sacredise.com

# All of Us in Wonderland

A Liturgical Guide for a six-week  
Pentecost Season

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Sacredise  
Johannesburg



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# Introduction

After all we've been through in the last two and half years, most of us are ready for a change. We all know now that what was normal in our global society wasn't working for anyone but a tiny, privileged few. We need to find another way of being. But for most of us, 'immersed in the way things are,' it's very difficult to imagine what a different life and a different world could look like. It might seem like the dream of a better, more compassionate and connected world is nothing more than a wonderland of fantasy.

But what if that wonderland is real? What if we really could dive down a metaphorical rabbit hole and discover a whole new wonderland world for all of us? Well, I believe that this is, essentially, what Jesus' message of God's reign of love was all about. And I believe that the experience of the Spirit that happened on the Day of Pentecost two thousand years ago was the rabbit hole that we need to enter God's new world.

Pentecost Sunday is a pivot point in the Church Calendar. It's mostly celebrated as a stand-alone event in the year, but it marks a significant shift. This is the day we move from the first half of the year, where the focus is on Jesus' birth, life, death and resurrection, to the second half of the year, where we focus on how to live as Jesus did. The gift of Spirit at Pentecost is the gift of sight to see the Wonderland of God's reign. It's the gift of longing to see that world become a reality among us. It's the gift of courage and strength to begin to live the way of Christ here and now. And for me there is great value in celebrating Pentecost as a season rather than just an event.

And that is why I am so excited to share this new Liturgical Guide for a six-week Pentecost Season: **ALL OF US IN WONDERLAND—Going down the rabbit hole into God's reign of love.** Based on the Lectionary readings for Year C from Pentecost Sunday to Proper 10, **ALL OF US IN WONDERLAND** offers everything you need to make Pentecost a season of opening to the Spirit and diving more deeply into the Wonderland of God's reign of Love.

**ALL OF US IN WONDERLAND** includes:

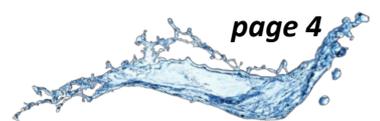
- Purpose-written liturgies for every one of the six weeks in this season;
- Sermon starters based on the Revised Common Lectionary Readings for Year C;
- A theme-based Table Liturgy that can be used at any time through the Pentecost Season;

## For Personal Spiritual Practice

**ALL OF US IN WONDERLAND** offers two options for personal spiritual practice to accompany the community worship experience.

The first is as follows:

- Create some way for your congregation to remember the message they will hear in church. You can encourage them to take notes, or give them a summary of the sermon, or have a recording of your message posted on social media.
- You can also make the response and integration practices in this resource available for people to use through the week.



A better approach would be to make use of the accompanying Personal Spiritual Practice Guide that has been developed to work alongside this guide for community worship.

- The Personal Spiritual Practice Guide offers a specific practice for every day of the Pentecost journey.
- Each day builds on the previous practice and is based on the sermon content from the relevant Sunday.
- In addition, it includes preparation, responding, and integrating practices to ensure that people can easily apply the message of each week to their own lives.

This guide is available separately in the Sacredise Store, or can be purchased in a bundle which includes the Liturgical Guide, the Personal Spiritual Practice Guide, and **a license for the daily practices to be distributed to congregation members** via email, messaging, print, or on your church's website or social media channels.

## *For Small Groups*

I believe that small groups work best as a bridge between Sunday worship and personal spiritual practice. For this reason, I would recommend connecting your small group work with both Sunday's worship—encouraging the groups to repeat the call to worship, response, and integrating practices—and the daily practice guides—inviting groups to share their personal insights and experiences as they've worked with Sunday's message.

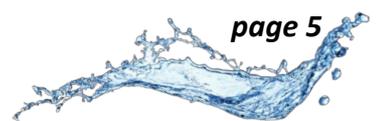
The following questions can be used as a helpful guide to sharing and conversation:

1. What stood out for you in this week's reading, and in the message that was preached? Why do you think this particularly caught your attention?
2. What does this 'word' mean to you for your spiritual walk in the next week, month, and year?
3. How are you working to integrate this 'word' into your daily living?

It is my hope and prayer that **ALL OF US IN WONDERLAND** will not only be meaningful for you and your community, but that it will be transforming. When the Pentecost experience of opening to the Spirit's presence becomes a constant part of our lives, we discover the wonder and joy of living in God's reign in the midst of our ordinary human lives. And our world desperately needs people who live their lives according to the values, priorities, and purposes of God's reign of love.

May God guide and bless you as you join **ALL OF US IN WONDERLAND** in this Pentecost Season!

John



# Down the Rabbit Hole

Pentecost Sunday

## Gathering

### CALL TO WORSHIP

*Begin the service with a moment of greeting. You may use a greeting that is customary for your tradition or create your own. Remember to allow a few moments for people to greet one another.*

*Invite the congregation into a moment of centring and silence. You may want to encourage them to close their eyes, slow and deepen their breathing, open their hands, and allow themselves to become aware of the Divine Presence.*

*After a while, you may want to introduce the following focus exercise:*

*Begin by asking:*

*What is keeping you from hope right now?*

*Allow a short time for people to consider their answers. Then ask:*

*Can you let go of whatever it is for a few moments as we share in this time of worship?*

*Allow a short time for people to practice letting go and prepare themselves for the worship ahead. Then you may lead the congregation in this or some other call to worship:*

We gather here, in this place and time,  
to set aside our routines,  
and the values and agendas  
of our society,  
and open our minds, hearts, and lives to God.

We come in response to God's call  
and in expectation of a new encounter  
with God's Spirit.

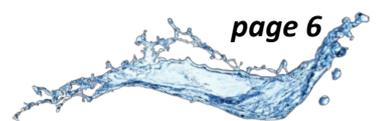
**Come, Holy Spirit,  
Make your Presence known among us,  
lead us into a deeper knowledge and love of God,  
and use our worship to transform us a little more  
into Christlikeness.**

**Amen**

*A Hymn/Song may be sung*

### PRAYER OF PRAISE AND CONFESSION

God, on this day we remember the Pentecost moment.  
The world has become something very different  
from your dream of love and care for all.



We have lost sight of the abundance we could enjoy  
if we worked together for the greater good,  
instead of holding on to as much as we can grab.  
But Jesus, you knew that there was a better way,  
that God's reign of love was possible after all.  
You also knew we couldn't do this alone;  
but you had a plan,  
a gift to us of the Spirit.

***Spirit, we open our hearts to you today,  
just as the disciples did on that Pentecost morning.  
We praise you for the vision of God's reign of love;  
And we praise you for the fire you stir up in us  
to make this vision a reality  
in every corner of our world.  
Thank you for being our guide on this journey  
our voice of comfort  
and our passion for a better world.  
Amen.***

*Listening*

#### SCRIPTURE READING

Acts 2:1-21

*A Hymn/Song may be sung*

#### SERMON STARTER

When we were in Cape Town, Debbie and I got to see an exhibition that celebrated Leonardo Da Vinci. We shot through the various rooms and displays, and it still took us over an hour. But if we had taken our time we could have spent hours there and not seen the same thing twice. It was overwhelming to see everything that this man had accomplished. His dream-like inventions, that must have seemed so fantastical in his time, are now commonplace. He envisioned the helicopter, the parachute and the military tank. He came up with ideas for scuba diving, and portable bridges. Before Copernicus he had already concluded that the earth moved around the sun, and before Galileo he had the idea of using a large magnifying lens to study the surface of the moon. Da Vinci was obsessed with "knowing how to see"—probably because he knew that those who can see differently change the world.

In 1999 the movie *The Matrix* caught the imagination of a generation. It gave voice to the feeling, that many of us experience, that the world we live in isn't really real. It's like a matrix—a way of seeing and believing and doing—that holds us prisoner, that we can't break out of. The values and priorities that drive us, the attitudes we have toward ourselves and others, the actions that fill our days, all are shaped and controlled by the systems that govern the world in which we live. And usually we don't even realise it. We go through life imagining that this is just the way it is, that nothing can change, and all we can do is make the most of it. Have you ever felt this way?

The Matrix movies drew on imagery from Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland*. They spoke of going down a rabbit hole, as Alice did, in order to see reality as never before and find a life that is real and meaningful.

Many of us have a nagging sense that this can't be it, that there has to be more to life than what we're experiencing. Most of us have moments where we dream of a different life and a different world. We look around us and we can't help but feel that there has to be a better way of organising the world. We look within us and we can't help but wonder if there isn't a better way to live. We long for a world where no one tells us who our enemies should be or who our friends should be, where no one tells us who we can or cannot love, where we don't have to just accept the way things are, and where we, and everyone, can do more than just survive.

But, in most cases, we just can't see what that different way might be. We don't see the hidden forces—what the Bible calls 'principalities and powers'—that shape our world. And we don't know how to break out of the inequality, injustice, and division until someone comes along and teaches us, in Da Vinci's language, how to see. And that is what the Pentecost celebration is all about.

Jesus was the classic "see things differently" guy who refused to abide by the illusions of his time and society. When the authorities said he couldn't heal on the Sabbath, he did. When the authorities labelled people as outcasts, unclean, or sinners Jesus called them friends. Jesus chose to see things differently and he showed us that it is possible to live differently: to love in a world of hatred and division, to give in a world of accumulation and need, to serve in a world of power-mongering and elitism.

But Jesus knew that we can't live like this in our own strength. He knew that we would never learn to see differently unless there was something—Someone—to show us and to lead us into a new kind of life. And so he made a promise to his disciples that, if they would wait for it and open to it, they would receive a gift that would change how they saw and that would empower them to live differently. That gift is the Holy Spirit.

It's not that God's Spirit wasn't around before Pentecost. It's that the disciples weren't able to see and experience the fullness of the Spirit's presence and power until Pentecost. But, when the day of Pentecost came, all heaven broke loose! Where they had been afraid of the authorities, they were now bold and outspoken. Where they were caught up in ethnic and religious differences, they now crossed all those boundaries in the Spirit's power—which is the meaning of the different languages they spoke. Where they had been unable to stand up for their faith, or to do the kind of things that Jesus did to heal and liberate people, now they had a power beyond themselves and they found themselves changing people's lives.

Some of those who witnessed this Pentecost moment were dismissive. Others recognised the significance, and asked, "What does this mean?" Peter's answer was that God was calling all people out of the default way of being that their culture and society imposed on them. God was telling them that there was a different way of seeing the world and a different way of living that was shaped not by the broken values of human society but by the values of God's love and justice. That's why Peter quoted from the prophet Joel: "Your young will see visions, and your old will dream dreams..."

C.S. Lewis noted that the world we live in feels so real and permanent to us. But he called this world the "Shadowlands" because he knew that the world of God's reign of love is far more real.

We will never find abundant life, the creativity to solve our problems, the wisdom to make the best choices, the courage to forgive, or the vulnerability to love deeply in our current systems of accumulation, power struggles, and separateness. We have the world we have because we see and live the way we do. It is only when we live in God's reign—when we see the world through the eyes of the Spirit and live according to God's values by the Spirit's power—that we discover what REAL life is like.

And so, the Pentecost moment, the moment of receiving the gift of God's Spirit, is a bit like going down a rabbit hole into the Wonderland of Love and justice that Jesus called the reign of God. It's an experience of breaking out of the world of 'this is just how it is' and of letting God open our eyes to a whole new reality. And if we allow the Spirit to awaken our hearts and minds to God's world everything will change for us. We and our world will never be the same because we will become those who see differently and therefore live differently.

So, what does this all mean for us now? It means that there is an invitation, a challenge, to which we must respond. God is offering us an opportunity to go down the rabbit hole and open ourselves to a new Pentecost, a new experience of the Spirit. And God asks us to allow the Spirit to lead us into God's Wonderland, God's new way of seeing and being. If you want to give it a try, here are some thoughts to guide you.

Firstly, you'll need to learn to listen to your longing. Resist the urge to silence that part of you that believes things can be different. That longing is God's call for you to participate in the real world—God's world.

Secondly, jump down the rabbit hole. Invite the Spirit to overwhelm you, to open your eyes, and to lead you into God's new Wonderland. In Luke, Jesus said that when we ask and keep on asking God will give us the Holy Spirit. And as we open ourselves more and more to the gift of Spirit, so we will find ourselves diving ever deeper into God's reign.

Finally, prepare for some disorientation. You may not feel anything strange or different at first. You may not notice anything changing at all. But it will. You'll get to the point where you look back and realise that you don't see the world the same way anymore and that your life has changed radically. Things that you once accepted as normal will no longer make sense to you. Things that you didn't know you were missing will become inspiring, life-giving, and essential to your life. And you will begin to see possibilities, opportunities, and wonders that fill you with hope and joy and love in a whole new way.

If you believe that the world is just fine as it is, then forget everything I've said. But if, somewhere deep inside you have a nagging feeling that the world could be different—more just, more compassionate, more joyful and free, not just for some, but for all—then I encourage you to let God's Spirit awaken you, or awaken you again, awaken you more. Let God show you that this is not 'just the way it is'—things can change. Let the Spirit lead you into another way of seeing and living that is more real, more alive, and more liberating than anything else can you could possibly imagine.

As George Bernard Shaw said, "Some people see things as they are and ask why? I dream things that never were and ask why not?" Imagine if those words described every one of us.

# Responding

A Hymn/Song may be sung

## PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING AND INTERCESSION

We know the nagging feeling that something is wrong,  
that our world doesn't have to be this way,  
so broken and bruised,  
so unjust and unloving.

**Thank you, Jesus, for being our example of change,  
for leading us to the rabbit hole.**

This journey into Wonderland is scary,  
it's new and unfamiliar,  
but it's exciting and full of potential too.

**Thank you, Spirit, for overwhelming our hearts,  
and giving us courage to jump into Wonderland!**

The change that happens within us might be small at first,  
and we may feel like this was all a dream.

**Remind us, Spirit, that growth is slow but steady,  
that change is happening within us  
even in this very moment.**

**Help us to cling to the vision of a better world.**

Others may not understand Wonderland,  
or they may be unable to believe  
that there is light in all this darkness after all.

**May we be those who gently guide them  
to the rabbit hole.**

**May we be those who remind them  
of the strength within to take the leap.**

**May we be those who encourage them  
when the journey of change seems overwhelming  
or even unreal and pointless.**

This journey down the rabbit hole will lead us into a better world,  
a more just, more joyful, more alive world.

**We take the leap and embrace every new colour  
and light and wonder that awaits us!**

**Amen.**

## RESPONSE RITUAL

The people may be invited into a time of response in which they can begin to work with what they have received through the sermon.

Invite the people to spend a few moments in silence thinking about two questions:

- What did you hear God say to you today?
- What will you do with God's word to you in the week to come?



After a few moments invite everyone to focus on their breathing as a meditation. As they inhale, encourage them to breathe in a deeper awareness of the Spirit. And as they exhale invite them to offer the following breath prayer either as a whisper or silently:

Spirit, open my eyes to the Wonderland of God's reign.

Repeat the inhale and breath prayer exhale three times. And then end this response practice with a few more moments of silence.

## Integrating

A Hymn/Song may be sung

### PRACTICE FOR THE WEEK

As the service is brought to a close encourage the people to continue working with what they've learned and received through the worship. They may want to follow the Personal Spiritual Practice Guide that accompanies this Liturgical Guide, or you can invite them to repeat the following simple A-B-C practice each day:

Begin by seeking intentionally to AWAKEN to the Spirit's presence, work, and life around you, within you, through you.

As you notice the Spirit's activity in your world, BREATHE as a way to open to, and receive, more of this gift in this day.

And finally, CHOOSE one thing you can do to share this gift with the people around you.

End your practice with a personal prayer as you go into your day.

### BENEDICTION AND SENDING

End the service with whatever greeting or blessing is appropriate or customary in your community. And then send the people out with the following words of encouragement:

Go in the power of the Spirit to live and work to God's praise and glory.

**We go in the name of Christ.**

**Amen.**

