



# Sunday Reflection

in the Charges of St Margarets, Renfrew  
& St Johns, Johnstone



For Sunday 19 May 2024

# Pentecost

**The Rector will preach at St John's  
& St Margaret's:-**

Today we come together to celebrate Pentecost, which both draws the season of Easter to its conclusion and marks the birth of the Church.

*"When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth." John 16:13*

## **An illustration to set the scene**

At one time, the **Carter Family** were one of the most influential music groups in the world.

The influence of their Gospel, country and folk music can be heard in bluegrass, country, pop and rock music, as well as the folk revival of the 1960s.

One of their best-known songs, recorded in 1935, is **"Will the Circle Be Unbroken"**.

You might know the words, which express both sadness at loss and faith in the afterlife:

I was standing by the window /  
on one cold and cloudy day /  
when I saw the hearse come rolling /  
for to carry my mother away.  
Will the circle be unbroken /  
by and by Lord, by and by.  
There's a better home awaiting /  
in the sky Lord, in the sky.

What you might not know is that these words were based on a song penned by an Englishwoman called Ada R. Habershon.

She was born in London in 1861 and raised in a well-to-do Christian home.

In her twenties she was a member of the circle surrounding the famous preacher Charles Spurgeon.

She met the American evangelists Dwight L. Moody and Ira D. Sankey during their tour of England.

By 1905 she was writing hymns for American evangelical preachers.

But for all her connections and the relative success she achieved during her lifetime, Ada could hardly have envisaged the reach of her legacy as a songwriter..

## Today's Gospel teaching

In our Gospel reading today Jesus refers to the Holy Spirit as "**the Advocate**", and explains to the disciples how the Holy Spirit will help them.

But first he acknowledges their sorrow that he must go away.

Having just been through the trauma of his death and the joy of his resurrection, they are clearly confused by the news that he will leave them again.

But he tells them it is necessary, so that he can send them the Advocate who, he says, will "**prove the world wrong about sin and righteousness and judgement**", and "**guide you into all the truth**".

The Advocate, Jesus says, "**will declare to you the things that are to come**".

The coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, therefore, marks the completion of an eternity ring – the past, present and future of God's great plan.

## How can we apply the teaching to our own lives?

Since it was first recorded, the Carter Family's song "**Will the Circle Be Unbroken**" has been sung and played all around the world.

It is fitting that a song about immortality has achieved a kind of immortality of its own.

Similarly, it is deeply embedded in the Christian faith that life follows death just as death follows life.

When one chapter ends, another starts.

As any gardener will testify, we see this in nature, particularly at this time of year, when evidence of new life is springing up all around, the bulbs and seedlings having been nurtured and nourished by things that have died and decayed over the winter.

This cyclical continuity is also reflected in the seasons of the Church – so today, at Pentecost, we conclude the season of Easter and celebrate the birth of the Church.

The circle is, indeed, unbroken.

In day-to-day life when we're facing loss – whether it's loss of a job, or of material possessions, or, like the disciples, losing a loved one – it's easy to forget that the end of one thing is always the beginning of another.

**"See,"** says God, in the book of Revelation (21:5), **"I am making all things new."**

So, as we stand on the threshold between two seasons, as spring becomes summer, as we think about the words of the song – **"Will the circle be unbroken / by and by Lord, by and by"** it's fitting to reflect on new beginnings in our own life, and ask God to remind us, when all seems hopeless, that we have the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, with us, and that within every apparent ending there are always possibilities for new growth and beginnings.

*"When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth." John 16:13*

[www.SECStJohnStMargaret.org.uk](http://www.SECStJohnStMargaret.org.uk)