

Pentecost Sunday – May 31st, 2020

Welcome.

Well I hope you enjoyed our short-lived summer as the heat of the past week as been replaced with the need to keep an eye on those tender tomato plants for a few nights, but I know many of the area farmers were certainly glad for the rain. And no I'm not dressed in red in support of tomatoes but in recognition of red being the liturgical colour of the season of Pentecost.

So I welcome you to a day on which we celebrate the birth of the church when wind, fire and Holy Spirit descended upon the disciples and friends of Jesus in the Upper Room.

Pentecost comes from the Greek word Pentècostè (pronounced pen-tay-kos-tay). Pentecost is a reference to the Jewish festival Shavout or the Festival of Weeks, which is held on the 50th day after the second day of Passover, commemorating the giving of the Torah to the Israelites on Mount Sinai. For us in the Christian faith Pentecost falls 50 days after Easter (counting Easter Sunday). So in the Spirit of fire, energy and passion of this occasion let us light these candles the celebration of Pentecost

Lighting the Candles

We know the tradition of candles especially on birthday cakes as a sign of light, life, and celebration, used as a symbol to mark the passage of time. May we understand these candles as markers of the birthday of the church, and may the light and warmth of these flames and the breath that we now use to blow the candles out be reminders of this birthday of the Christian church called Pentecost. In this light let us pray.

Opening Prayer

Loving God, we thank you for today. And for that day, long ago, when you poured yourself out, in a new and marvelous way, to renew your people and your creation. Send your Spirit upon us this day, O God. Touch us with the flames of your love.

Stir us with the power of your word.

Keep us strong in faith and grounded in truth.

Then, send us out in the power of your Spirit to share the love of Jesus with everyone. Amen.

Song – We once again welcome Devin Howard who will inspire us with a song called “Consuming Fire” written by Hillsong United. Thanks again Devin. You truly make our time together meaningful.

Scripture – Acts 2:1–21

2 When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. ²Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. ³They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. ⁴All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.

⁵Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven. ⁶When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard their own language being spoken. ⁷Utterly amazed, they asked: “Aren’t all these who are speaking Galileans? ⁸Then how is it that each of us hears them in our native language? ⁹Parthians, Medes and Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, ¹⁰Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene; visitors from Rome ¹¹(both Jews and converts to Judaism); Cretans and Arabs—we hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!” ¹²Amazed and perplexed, they asked one another, “What does this mean?”

¹³Some, however, made fun of them and said, “They have had too much wine.”

¹⁴Then Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice and addressed the crowd: “Fellow Jews and all of you who live in Jerusalem, let me explain this to you; listen carefully to what I say. ¹⁵These people are not drunk, as you suppose. It’s only nine in the morning! ¹⁶No, this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel:

- ¹⁷“In the last days, God says,
I will pour out my Spirit on all people.
Your sons and daughters will prophesy,
your young men will see visions,
your old men will dream dreams.
¹⁸Even on my servants, both men and women,
I will pour out my Spirit in those days,
and they will prophesy.
¹⁹I will show wonders in the heavens above
and signs on the earth below, blood and fire and billows of smoke.
²⁰The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood
before the coming of the great and glorious day of the Lord.
²¹And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.’ [c]

Meditation – The Real Miracle

After this morning’s reading from the book of Acts I was wondering if a memorable introduction to this sermon would be to yell – “You’re all drunk – with the Spirit.” But I decided I would take it in a slightly different direction.

All of you have heard stories of miracles. A favorite miracle story of mine comes from the life of Helen Keller. Over and over again, her remarkable teacher Ann Sullivan spelled words into the deaf and blind child’s hand. But Helen couldn’t make the connections. Finally, one day Ann was spelling the word “water” on one of Helen’s hands while pouring water on the other hand. Suddenly Helen jumped up and raced around and shrieked for joy. She understood. That was the miracle that set her on a path of discovery that changed her life and inspired millions.

There is a widely reported miracle story that tells of two men who fought in World War II. They were good friends. One was a Christian and one was an agnostic. One night the Christian man had a dream. The next morning he insisted that his friend take his pocket Bible into battle with him. He wouldn't take no for an answer. The friend gave in and slipped the Bible into his vest pocket. He caught a bullet on the battlefield that day. It hit him so hard it knocked him over. When he stood up he was startled to discover that he wasn't injured. The bullet had lodged itself in the center of the Bible. That man was no longer an agnostic.

We could trade miracle stories all day to see who had the most amazing one, but I think we have already heard it. It's the story of the first Pentecost. That was a miracle to top all miracles! Picture the setting. Scholars think it was May 25th in the year 33 A.D. Throngs of people were pouring into Jerusalem. They were gathering for the great Jewish Festival of Weeks. This festival was a lot like our Thanksgiving.

There were only 120 Christians in Jerusalem at that time. Many of them had gathered for prayer in a room in the city. Suddenly, about 9 a.m., a noise like the rush of a mighty wind swept into the room (probably even louder than that car with no muffler which just drove past), filling the whole house with a whistling roar. Then something like flames of fire rested on the heads of the people, yet their hair was not burning. As though that weren't enough though all the noise and excitement, the people who witnessed this surprising event all heard their own

languages being spoken. Fourteen different languages in all, from a group who seemed to be mostly uneducated Galilean fisherfolk

The miracle attracted others in a city that was already crowded. Peter started to preach and everyone was struck by the change in him. This wasn't the bumbling Peter. This was a new Peter, bold and confident. His weaknesses had apparently vanished.

And this is only half of the miracle. The response was the other half, the statistic is astounding: If we continue to read the following verses of scripture it tells us that 3,000 people were baptized! The Christian community grew from 120 to a whopping 3,000 in one day! The next day, Peter and John healed a crippled man. Then Peter preached again and the number of believers increased to 5,000.

Thirty years later the historian Cornelius Tacitus recorded that Nero, the emperor of Rome, began the first great persecution against "a vast multitude of Christians. From 120 to 3,000 to 5,000 to a vast multitude. Now that's a major miracle! For a philosophy or teaching to spread this far this fast in the ancient world was absolutely unheard of. It simply had never happened before.

The pilgrims who were visiting Rome that May day in the year 33 A.D. returned to their homes and became the human fuses igniting the fire of Christianity everywhere in the ancient world. At that time in history the church had no mission, it had no

official evangelism committee, no educational program, no administrative structure. Rather, it left everything to the individual.

This is the true Pentecost miracle: that anonymous persons, hundreds of them, were inspired by the Spirit to use their gifts and tell the story. They were just average people under threat of arrest or death who accomplished unbelievable feats on a scale never before imagined. Is this not the greatest miracle of all? People's gifts were set free. Like Peter, they became inspired people.

This still happens. The Spirit is still setting people free. Sometimes we resist it. We don't let the Spirit take hold of us. We don't even recognize that we have gifts to be freed. We're too shy or too busy, or afraid. But sometimes the Spirit finds a way to sneak in anyway. How can this happen?

If recollection serves me right My grandmother on my dad's side was an almost perfect role model. She practiced what she preached and lived her life for others. Although she was not a wealthy woman, almost anything she could spare went to helping others. When it became necessary for her, in her eighties, to go into a nursing home, she welcomed the opportunity. She said, 'There might be some people there who don't know the Lord and I can read the Bible to them.' " Now there was a woman on fire with the Pentecost Spirit!

Some of you will remember the movie that came out in 1995, called *Mr. Holland's Opus*. It's a wonderful story about a dedicated teacher who struggles to write a symphony while teaching high school.

After mentoring thousands of young people, Mr. Holland was forced to retire because of budget cuts. Unknown to him, hundreds of his present and former students gathered in the high school auditorium to pay tribute to him and hear his symphony performed for the first time. At that point there wasn't a dry eye in the movie theater. I'll never forget what one of Mr. Holland's students said: "Mr. Holland, you have written the symphony, but we are your music."

Now you may not have as dramatic a finish as Mr. Holland. Real life doesn't always turn out like that. But, people can be your music too if you allow yourself and your gifts to be used by the Holy Spirit. It doesn't have to be a spectacular thing. People whose gifts are set free are inspiring our children. Others are waiting for the day when they can again visit shut-ins, others are planting flowers or working the garden for a neighbour, while Others are reaching out to those who are grieving or even just making that simple phone call.. It doesn't matter if you have one gift or ten. What matters is that you use them, that you allow the Spirit to set them free. Your gifts can change the world.

I am praying that this week we may be - moved, inspired, challenged. Three thousand did that day, the day we call Pentecost. What sounded like wind, what appeared to be tongues

of fire, touched and moved that diverse congregation, and brought a unity and a life that they had never before experienced. The disciples in the other room, after being breathed upon were sent out to inspire and change the world.

What would it mean for us to unlock the doors, and let the winds of the Spirit blow through? Pentecost was the explosion of the Holy Spirit into the midst of a confused and discouraged people something I think that many of us can relate to at this time.

Pentecost enabled and empowered a desperate people to be a community of incredible, even unbelievable faith. This scattered and scared, shattered and shrinking group couldn't even share their fears and concerns.

They couldn't understand each other and when differences overwhelmed them, the Holy Spirit came upon them and young and old, male and female, of all tongues and races could understand and hear and act. Pentecost calls us to breathe, to open our eyes to feel the spirit move. When we're afraid we freeze ourselves into the traditions of the past; we close our eyes to the sights of a changing world, and we hold our breath, resisting the call of the indwelling spirit.

Madeleine L'Engle has written a poem based on the experience of the woman who touched the hem of Jesus' garment and was healed. (as found in Matthew 9 verse 20) It too speaks of what it might mean for us to be open to the touch of the Holy Spirit: She writes:

I saw him ahead of me in the crowd
and there was something in his glance
and in the way his hand rested briefly
on the matted head of a small boy
who was getting in everyone's way,
and I knew that if only I could get to him,
not to bother him, you understand,
not to interrupt, or to ask him for anything,
not even his attention,
just to get to him and touch him ...

I didn't think he'd mind, and he needn't even know.
I pushed through the crowd
and it seemed that they were deliberately
trying to keep me from him.
I stumbled and fell and someone stepped on my hand
and I cried out
and nobody heard. I crawled to my feet
and pushed on and at last I was close,
so close that I could reach out
and touch with my fingers the hem of his garment.

Have you ever been near when lightening struck?
I was once, when I was very small
and a summer storm came without warning
and lightening split the tree
under which I was playing
and I was flung right across the courtyard.

That's how it was.

Only this time I was not the child, but the tree
and the lightening filled me.

He asked, Who touched me?

and people dragged me away, roughly,
and the men around him were angry at me.

Who touched me? he asked.

I said, I did, Lord,

so that he might have the lightening back
which I had taken from him when I touched
his garment's hem.

He looked at me and I knew then

that only he and I knew about the lightening.

He was tired and emptied, but he was not angry.

He looked at me

and the lightening returned to him again,
though not from me, and he smiled at me
and I knew that I was healed.

Then the crowd came between us

and he moved on, taking the lightening with him,
perhaps to strike again.

There it is, God's spirit moving from place to place, person to
person, touching, healing, encouraging, sending us back into the
world, to share our lightening, which is his lightening. Thanks be
to God.

Pastoral Prayer

Flaming God of Pentecost,
Let us speak in tongues of comfort
to those weeping over the loss of their loved ones
shot by troubled gunmen, the Newfoundland fishermen lost at sea
never to return, those dying from Covid-19, or those who
unexplainably have been taken from us.

Let us speak in tongues of courage
to those living in fear
of the next shooting, the next bomb, the illness that threatens.

Let us speak in tongues of condemnation
against laws and policies that promote violence,
prioritizing the preferences of some over the lives of others.

Let us speak in tongues of care
for the most vulnerable in our world—
human beings, animals, and ecosystems.

Let us speak in tongues of love
for you and for your people,
that Your language might be our language.

And when our tongues are still,
when we have no words to speak,
let our hearts burn with your fire,
let our ears hear your words in our own native tongue,
let our skin feel the wind of your Spirit—
a mighty wind, blowing where it will, enticing us to live into the words
that you taught us to Pray
Our Father who art in Heaven,
Amen

Song

Please enjoy our closing hymn Holy Spirit, Living Breath of God –
sung by Keith and Kristyn Getty. Have a Blessed Week until we meet
again.