

Arden Pastoral Charge

May 23, 2021:

Pentecost: On the Job Training

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Jesus said: “When two or three are gathered in my name, I am there.”
Today we gather in Spirit, and Christ is here.

Gathering Prayer:

“Do we come together this day
soaring, flowing, questing, dancing,
as the Holy Spirit leads us to praise?

Do we come together this day,
searching, finding, changing, challenging,
as the Holy Spirit calls us to faithfulness?

Do we come together this day,
gently, calmly, simply, persistently,
as the Holy Spirit invites us to reflection?

Do we come together this day
with perseverance, with encouragement, with joy and with urgency
as the Holy Spirit moves us to action.

Come Holy Spirit, and be with us, now and always. Amen.”¹

Scripture: Our scripture this morning is the story of the gift of the Holy Spirit to the Christ followers at Pentecost. Pentecost is considered the birthday of the church and is the beginning of the Church’s mission in the world. Pentecost

¹ David Sparks, Prayers to Share, year B, 102 (adapted CMM).

comes from the Greek word *pentekoste*, which translates to 50th day. We celebrate Pentecost on the 50th day following Easter.

This Christian Holy Day was first a Jewish Holy Day. The Jewish feast day of Shavuot was primarily a thanksgiving for the first fruits of the wheat harvest, but it was later associated with a remembrance of the Law – the Ten Commandments given by God to Moses on Mount Sinai. Scripture tells us how the Jewish people, the apostles and others who were followers of Jesus, were gathered for the Shavuot festival when the Holy Spirit came upon them.

Reading Acts 2: 1 - 21 from the Inclusive Bible

When the day of Pentecost arrived, they all met in one room. Suddenly they heard what sounded like a violent, rushing wind from heaven; the noise filled the entire house in which they were sitting. Something appeared to them that seemed like tongues of fire; these separated and came to rest on the head of each one. They were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages as she enabled them.

Now there were devout people living in Jerusalem from every nation under heaven, and at this sound they all assembled. But they were bewildered to hear their native languages being spoken. They were amazed and astonished: ‘Surely all of these people speaking are Galileans! How does it happen that each of us hears these words in our native tongue? We are Parthians, Medes and Elamites, people from Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya around Cyrene, as well as visitors from Rome – all Jews, or converts to Judaism – Cretans and Arabs too; we hear them preaching, each in our own language, about the marvels of God!’

All were amazed and disturbed. They asked each other, ‘What does this mean?’ But others said mockingly, ‘They’ve drunk too much new wine.’

Then Peter stood up with the Eleven and addressed the crowd: ‘Women and men of Judea, and all you who live in Jerusalem! Listen to what I have to say! These people are not drunk as you think – it’s only nine o’clock in the morning! No, it’s what Joel the prophet spoke of:

‘In the days to come – it is our God who speaks – I will pour out my Spirit on all humankind. Your daughters and sons will prophesy, your young people will see visions, and your elders will dream dreams. Even on the most insignificant of my people, both women and men, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy. And I will display wonders in the heavens above and signs on the earth below: blood, fire and billowing smoke. The sun will be turned into darkness and the moon will become blood before the coming of the great and sublime day of our God... And all who call on the name of our God will be saved.’

This is the Word of God for the people of God. Thanks be to God. Amen.

Thoughts Along the Way:

Last week’s scripture from Acts was of the eleven disciples choosing a twelfth. I called it a ‘help wanted’ moment. Jesus had been betrayed, crucified, resurrected, and had ascended into heaven. Judas, his betrayer, was no more, and thus the eleven disciples were needing a twelfth before moving ahead with their directive from Jesus to *‘preach repentance and the forgiveness of sins to all nations.’* (Luke 24: 47).

If that was the ‘help wanted’ moment, today’s scripture is all about the job training. Job training in the form of apprenticeship and mentorship is a long standing and time honoured tradition. It hearkens back to biblical times. Bakers, tailors, tentmakers, fishermen, carpenters... It was form of training that took years. It placed you in the company of a skilled craftsperson, where you learned more than the actual tasks needed to complete the job. You learned how to talk to people, and build relationships with your community. You learned how to recognize quality work. You learned how to problem solve. You learned how to

price a job and barter. You worked beside the master on mundane tasks, until your master felt you were ready for more challenging ones. Over time, as you gained skill, you took on the persona of the master of the trade, as a master of the trade. Then, when you were ready, you set up your own shop, and had folks come to you, asking to train under you. It is much the same today.

This was the model the followers of Jesus were familiar with, and the model Jesus used when he called the twelve to follow him, and learn a new craft. They lived together and travelled together, listened when Jesus taught, watched as he healed, sat in fear as storms subsided at a word, and in awe as thousands were fed from a single basket. Then came the time for them to go out on their own. Luke in chapter 9 tells us that: *'Jesus called the twelve together and gave them power and authority to overcome all demons and to cure diseases. He sent them forth to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal the afflicted. So they set out and went from village to village, spreading the Good News everywhere and healing people.'* (Luke 9: 1-2, 6)

We don't know how long they were gone. We do know that they came back together with Jesus for more travelling, more teaching, more lessons. We do know they were together when they journeyed to Jerusalem for the Passover festival. We do know they were together for the events of betrayal and crucifixion, and for that day of astonishment and joy when the tomb was found empty. Luke tells us that after his resurrection, Jesus appeared to two of the disciples as they walked to a village called Emmaus. And when he appeared again to the eleven in Jerusalem, Luke writes that they *'were incredulous for sheer joy and wonder.'* (Luke 24: 41). Jesus stayed with them a while and reassured them, and reminded them: *'Remember the words I spoke when I was still with you: everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the psalms had to be fulfilled. That is why the scriptures said that the Messiah must suffer and rise from the dead on the third day. In the Messiahs' name, repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. You are witnesses of all this. I am sending forth what Abba God has promised to you. Remain here in the city until you are clothed with the power from on high.'* (Luke 24: 44-49).

And so they remained in the city, waiting for the power from on high. Now they are gathered for the feast of Shavout, a Jewish harvest festival – the ones the Greeks called Pentecost. The believers with the disciples, were seated inside, when a noise which sounded like a violent, rushing wind from heaven filled the entire house.

I do not live in tornado or hurricane country, so I have little experience with the sound of truly violent winds. There was once, though, when we were on a family camping vacation. We spent the night in a valley on the Cape Breton trail of Nova Scotia. In the middle of the night, a wind came down the mountains through the valley. It sounded like a freight train roaring towards us. I woke with a start and ran to the door of the camper to see what was happening.

In the same way, I imagine, at the sound of this wind, someone rushes to a window, someone else to the door, to see what is happening outside. A sudden storm, perhaps? That must be it. Then seeing nothing, they turn, and what appears to be tongues of fire is resting above each of their heads. The group looks at each other in fear and awe, wiping the blowing dust from their eyes, certain they are seeing something that cannot be, pointing at each other. And when the wind dies and the flames disappear, they turn to each other to exclaim, ‘What was that?!’ ‘Are you all right?!’ Only to discover that the words they are speaking are not their own. Their language is not their own.

This gift of power from on high, the gift of tongues from the Holy Spirit, was what Jesus had asked them to wait for. It was the only thing, the only skill they still needed in order to do the job they had trained for. They had apprenticed under him, had preached and healed and cast out demons. They had seen the miracle of resurrection and ascension, and had Jesus’ assurance that they lived and worked in the light and love of God. The only thing holding them back from preaching to all nations was their ability to speak the languages of the peoples who lived in all those nations. And now that skill had been bestowed upon them.

Peter stood to address the crowd outside the house. The crowd gathered because they too had heard the sound of the wind. They came together, bewildered, because as the wind died down, they began to hear their native

languages being spoken from those inside the house. Their bewilderment turned to amazement and astonishment. Peter's impromptu sermon "was based upon the words of the Old Testament prophet Joel, and filled the air with Spirit-filled visions and dreams involving blood and fire and billowing smoke."²

It is easy to get the impression that Peter was channeling a little of the fire and brimstone preacher: *'The sun will be turned into darkness and the moon will become blood before the coming of the great and sublime day of our God.'* But listen to what Peter says next, to what follows our scripture passage this morning:

'People of Israel, hear this: Jesus of Nazareth was sent to you with miracles, portents and signs as his credentials – which God performed through him in your midst. Jesus was delivered up by the set purpose and plan of God. God freed him from death's bitter pangs, and raised him up again, for it was impossible that death could keep its hold on him. God raised Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses to that. Exalted to the right hand of God, Jesus received the promise of the Holy Spirit from Abba God, and what you now hear and see is the outpouring of that promise. Therefore, let the whole house of Israel know beyond any doubt that God made this Jesus, both Messiah and Sovereign.' (Acts 2: 22-24, 32-33, 36).

The imagery of last things, of the last days, was really just part and parcel of Peter saying that as of this moment, with this gift of power from the Holy Spirit, the new days, the new creation in Christ's name established through God's purpose and plan, had begun.

You who call on the name of our God will be saved. Dreams and visions and prophesy will be yours. The power from on high, the gifts of the Holy Spirit have been poured onto you. You may not have the gift of tongues and the ability to speak and understand languages. Perhaps, instead, your gift is in knowledge and your ability to learn and teach; or your gift is wisdom and the ability to impart it to others; or your gift is healing, like the many in our medical professions; or your gift is hospitality, offering comfort and welcome; or your gift lies in creativity and your ability to create with words and art; or your gift is in doing the hard and heavy work with body and hands that provides food and shelter. Perhaps you

² G. Lee Ramsey Jr., *Homiletical Perspective, Feasting on the Word, Year B, Vol 3, 3.*

have not quite discovered what your gift is, or perhaps you discern your gift to be changing from what it was... that's ok too.

In the first letter of Peter, he writes: '*God has given each of you a gift from his great variety of spiritual gifts. Use them well to serve one another.*' (1 Pet 4: 10). That might be the greatest lesson to be learned from Pentecost. That the Holy Spirit has given each of us gifts, and that we are to use them, whatever they are, to serve each other, as we move into this new day and into this new creation in Christ's name. Amen.

Prayers of the People

Living, loving God,
into our lives you blow the winds of Spirit,
knocking us off balance, challenging our footing and comfort.
Guiding Saviour and friend Jesus,
upon us you breath the Holy Spirit,
promising this gift that will empower us and sustain us for your work in the world.

And so,
"The Spirit calls us, and we are encouraged to respond faithfully.
The Spirit moves us, and we are encouraged to work diligently.
The Spirit fills us, and we are encouraged to live peacefully.
The Spirit challenges us, and we are encouraged to act with justice.
The Spirit loves us, and we are encouraged to mirror that love, every day and in every way."³

Living, loving God, Guiding Saviour and friend Jesus, Spirit of passion and change,
We pray for the needs of all during this time
– for health, for family, for food and shelter, for financial security,
for justice, and for equality.
We pray for wisdom for leaders of nations.

³ David Sparks, Prayers to Share, Year B, 103.

We pray for courage and comfort for medical staff, and for front line and essential service workers.

We pray for patience as we and our communities struggle with the conditions set upon us because of COVID-19.

We pray for those who are ill, in body and mind and spirit,
and for loved ones who cannot be close enough to care for or comfort them.

We pray for all who have asked for our prayers...

We pray for all who have no one to pray for them...

We pray especially for those near and dear to our hearts.....

“Pour out upon us the gift of Spirit,
so that in hearing and seeing the gifts of this life,
we may know the way to live in thanksgiving.”⁴

Hear these prayers as we offer the words given us by Christ to you, our Mother of Wisdom and our Father...

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.
Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us;
and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.

We give thanks to God for blessings and gifts given. We, in turn, offer our gifts of time, talent and treasure to God. Your gifts can be sent to June Hughes for Arden United Church, Sheila Deline for Henderson United Church, or Sharon MacMunn

⁴ Feasting on the Word: Worship Companion, Year B, Vol 1, 184.

for Mountain Grove United Church. You can also visit our website – www.ardenpastoralcharge.ca – where you will find a ‘Donate’ button.

On behalf of the congregations of Arden, Henderson and Mountain Grove, I do wish to thank you for your financial contributions to our churches.

Benediction:

“Jesus did not leave us without hope
But sent the Holy Spirit to nurture faith and love in this world.
May we live this vision in all that we do.”⁵

And now, may the grace of Christ attend you,
the love of God surround you,
and the Holy Spirit keep you. Amen.

⁵ Feasting on the Word: Worship Companion, Year B, Vol 1, 186.