

Squamish United Church  
Rev. Karen Millard  
Pentecost Sunday

May 31, 2020

Scripture reading:  
Acts 2:11-21

### **Pentecost Day**

Listen, can you hear the wind?

**Come, Holy Spirit; come!**

Look, can you see the dancing flames?

**Come, Holy Spirit; come!**

Can you hear the message  
in a language you can understand?

**Come, Holy Spirit; come!**

Do you see the visions?

Can you dream the dreams?

**Come, Holy Spirit; come!**

Come let Pentecost be real in our lives Come and worship God who sends the Spirit to touch us and transform us into Pentecost people.

I love the images and the drama of pentecost. I love the dancing flames and the blowing wind of the spirit. Dreaming dreams and being filled with visions - sign me up. I love the diversity of language and culture being brought together. I love the images but even more than that I love how it brings us back to the roots of our faith and our purpose.

Throughout this Easter season, since the day we started recording worship in this way we have proclaimed that love is what binds us together to God, to Jesus, to each other. Love IS our religion. In the Christian tradition on the day of Pentecost, the church received the power of the Holy Spirit so that this message would flow out *from* all, *to* all. The Spirit is poured out on each one of us so we become a community of messengers letting compassion flow from our hearts.

Pentecost is the Christian reinterpretation of the ancient Jewish pilgrimage festival, the Festival of Weeks, or Shavuot (pronounced "sha-voOAT"), celebrated 50 days after Passover. For the ancient Israelites, this festival was a harvest celebration, for Christians, Pentecost celebrates the reception of the Holy Spirit and the birth of the church.

The disciples are gathered because of the Festival of Shavuot. Jesus had promised the arrival of the Holy Spirit and sure enough not long after his departure, on the festival day itself, the Holy Spirit arrives. The scene is spectacular and chaotic: a violent, rushing sound like wind, and then "divided tongues, as of fire" - not a fire that destroys, but rather like the fire Moses encountered at the burning bush, "blazing, but not consumed" (Exodus 3:1-2). The Spirit's immediate effect

is linguistic: many are empowered “to speak in other languages,” and at the same time, each person hears the testimony in his or her native language. This is a scene of togetherness and unity: diverse as they are, everyone understands and can communicate. And at the same time they are dazzled and taken aback.

Peter stands and speaks as if to explain what is happening. He cites the prophet Joel, the dawn of God’s Jubilee the “pouring out” of the Holy Spirit upon “all flesh” The Spirit empowers this community to be healers, liberators, those who bring joy to the ends of the earth.

The question of “what is the church?” Is a popular one amongst church folks lately because we have been forced to do church in an entirely new way. Meme’s are popping up everywhere on my Facebook feed (because I am a church geek) things like “The building may be closed but the church is always open.” “The church is not a building it’s the people.” One of the challenging gifts of this time for so many of us is that we have been forced to ask what is our purpose, what are we doing? I know friends who have businesses of every kind that are asking that question right now and the church is too. Some who had perhaps forgotten are remembering that the church is love, spirit, compassion, grace, hope, understanding, walking alongside...

The church is called to be a dynamic community of people following Jesus, empowered by the Holy Spirit to carry out God’s mission of healing, liberation, and joy for the sake of all creation. Jesus’ life and ministry along with the movement of the spirit at pentecost announces God’s love is for everyone and anyone. The church gets it right when it is a diverse, prophetic community of bridge-builders, visionaries, and dreamers, male and female, other, slave and free. In the early church once they experience the spirit they are filled with compassion. “they sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need”

The breath of the spirit means new life, new growth, change, and ongoing development. The Spirit protects, but also challenges, provoke and pushes us along. Pentecost for me today is perhaps more real than ever. I have not been a minister in a time of ‘christendom.’ I have never pastored in a place where Christianity or organized religion wasn’t questioned, feared or even destained by many. When I look at the global popular public stereotypical representation of Christianity I get it. I fear, question and sometimes even distain it myself.

And yet I know and I believe Love and God’s spirit are alive and well even in the midst of pandemic. The spirit of love is everywhere open your eyes and you will see it in your neighbour, in your friend, in the police officer, the paramedic, the nurse, the doctor, the grocery store clerk or even the security guard who stands outside and asks you to wait. The spirit of love is everywhere open your eyes and you will see it in the people who pick up groceries for a neighbour, or offer a helping hand, in the person making masks or the restaurant owner and server who has changed everything they do to keep you safe and serve you well. What about the teachers that have adapted everything because they love building up your children and I have seen the tears in their eyes because they miss them. Love is found when people provide sanitizer or even put marks of the floor so you know where to stand. It’s hard work but we do it for the

well-being of everyone. Listen it's hard for some to understand our church will not open up to in person worship yet not because we don't care but because your life and your wellbeing is more important to us than filling our seats.

It's true that there are people who are not living so kindly right now and that has been tragic to see especially as we see racism back on a rise and people judging others who are just trying to get by and that is when I want to say to us that the spirit of love and the flame of compassion is offered to all of us and it is within all of us to and right now we need to pour it out.

So on this pentecost day lets say Happy Birthday and let's go  
The church or Christianity is not a building, nor is it a particular membership or group of people - nor is it a *gathering* of people together in one place. Rather, at its heart, it's mission, God's mission, loving and protecting our neighbours as we would love and protect ourselves - and the call, the challenge, the adventure continues. Let us offer the spirit of love, compassion, grace and abundance to all the world.

Today and always

Amen!