

## **Pentecost Sunday – St. Clement's Anglican Church**

**May 31, 2020**

What happens when a storm descends upon one's life and disrupts it entirely? Over the past two and a half months, we have had the chance to find out. COVID-19 has swept over the earth, upending how each of us shops, socializes, works, and worships. As we have seen, it has brought out the best in people; it has triggered cooperation between different agencies, vast creativity and ingenuity on the part of many, and countless acts of simple everyday kindness between strangers.

It has also exposed and ripped open the weaknesses in our societies; we have seen in heartbreakingly detail the results of underfunding seniors' care, we have seen escalating domestic violence, we have seen that, as always, it is the poorest people on the planet who are suffering most the effects of this storm.

The descent of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost was, as well, a disruptive force like no other. And while it was of divine origin and brought with it life, not death, it was not a gentle breeze at a summertime picnic. It is described as coming like the sound of a violent wind that filled every inch of the air around the apostles. Each of them had a tongue of fire alight upon them. A cacophony of language erupted from them and around them.

Peter's thoughts immediately turned to the prophet Joel who had cautioned that God would make himself revealed by a sun turned to darkness and a moon turned to blood. Although the Holy Spirit is symbolized as a dove

elsewhere in the Scriptures, there is no such pastoral imagery here. The coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost cannot have been a comfortable experience, to put it very mildly.

*Come, Holy Spirit, come.* How often have we prayed these words, as individuals or as the church? But are we, in truth, ready and willing to undergo such a disruption as described in the Book of Acts? What would such a storm churn up in our lives; would it reveal the dark corners as well as empower us to be bearers of the light?

Perhaps because we cannot all gather in person today to celebrate the birthday of the Christian church, my thoughts have turned to my own place in the Pentecost story. And I have been wondering, when it comes to the descent of the Holy Spirit into my life, how much is God's work, and how much is mine? Is it my job to get my house in order first, to sweep out the spiritual dust bunnies, to set a place for the Spirit's coming? Or do I relax into the knowledge that God will find me regardless of the state of my soul?

Yes, I expect, is the answer to both questions. As humans, we have to learn again and again that we cannot control everything; we have to leave room for God to work in our hearts in ways beyond our imagining, sometimes when and how we least expect it. That takes a certain acquiescence; a hopeful passivity. A trust that God will find us and lift us up, often despite, not because of, our efforts.

At the same time, we remember the story of the farmer who cast his seed for planting, knowing that a harvest will only result when the seed falls on

fertile ground. Tilling our soil, preparing our hearts and minds to receive God's love and to reflect it to others, takes a certain amount of commitment and discipline. That takes active engagement. It is, after all, hard to see the movement of the Spirit in your life if it has never occurred to you to look for it.

The blowing winds of the Holy Spirit can do so much more in us and with us if our sails are primed and ready; instead of the storm wrecking us against the dock it can take us out to high sea. Perhaps it is a little akin to winning a \$50M lottery – what would you do with that shocking, unexpected resource? Would you spend it recklessly and end up lonely and bankrupt? Would you spend it contentedly on yourself and your closest circle? Or would you share it in as many good ways as possible? The values you had spent years cultivating before you bought that lucky ticket would very likely determine how your windfall was spent.

How had the apostles prepared for the descent of the Holy Spirit that day, for the great unleashing of energy that was wrought in their lives? They were, of course, experiencing a time of great uncertainty. Jesus was no longer walking among them; before his Ascension, he had made cryptic references to a baptism by the holy spirit so here they were, stuck in Jerusalem, often hidden from the authorities, waiting for they knew not what. So how did they spend that in-between time?

They prayed. After the Ascension, the disciples are described as being continuously at prayer, at the temple and in the upper room.

They gave thanks. Pentecost, the event that brought the disciples to the temple first thing in the morning, is the Greek name given to the Jewish Festival of Weeks, a little like our Harvest Thanksgiving; an occasion on which to celebrate the first wheat harvests and to give the first fruits to God.

They gathered. Whether it was in the Upper Room, or at the festival, or with a crowd of followers, they showed up. God is, of course, active in our individual lives but there is a special synergy when God meets us in community; where the two or three are gathered together. Where people of faith can flourish from the structure, accountability and companionship offered by other believers – either in person or online.

And they grew. Jesus's followers didn't use this in-between time as an excuse to put their feet up or to drift off to other pursuits. The remaining 11 disciples even mounted an election to vote in Matthias as a replacement for Judas.

All of which meant that when that great disrupting spirit came upon them at Pentecost, they were ready and willing to be used as messengers of God's grace. And it strikes me that the preparation they did offers you and me an essential model for our own lives, particularly right now.

St. Clement's will soon have the exciting disruption of a new priest. That person will blow in our door, arriving amongst us with a new energy, bringing new challenges and possibilities. Will that new spirit unlock in *us* new dreams, new visions, new determination, new levels of commitment? How might we spend the in-between time until their arrival preparing

ourselves to that end? Well, like the disciples, we can pray; we can give thanks; we can gather (in whatever way we can); and we can grow – as individuals and as a community. Let us recommit ourselves to all these practices with even greater enthusiasm in the weeks to come, so that our new rector will find us spirited companions as we journey together into St. Clement's future.

*Holy One,*

*We remember your promise to live in us if we live in you. We give thanks for the gift of your Holy Spirit; may we, like the first disciples, use this gift to show your love to all we meet, knowing that across every race and nation, each of us are beloved children of your creation. Amen.*

And now, in thanksgiving and celebration for the Christian church in every time and place, let's enjoy this Pentecost video of the Lord's Prayer as offered in different languages by members of the Anglican Church across Canada – including one person whose face you'll find very familiar.

- The Rev. Peggy Trendell-Jensen