



May 23, 2021

Melville United Church
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Melville United Church

May 23, 2021

Pentecost

Presiding today - Rev. Marion Loree

Sharing the Light: *(If you are watching this on-line or reading it from a page I invite you to take a moment to light a candle, centre yourself and prepare to enter into a time of worship and prayer. As you light your candle repeat the following words:*

We light a candle today to remind us
that there is a mysterious power or presence that connects us all -
we call it God.
that this mysterious presence dwells within each of us -
as it did in the person of Jesus whom we call the Christ.
that we *cannot* be separated from this Presence that is
the Spirit of Love which created us and that is part of us always.

Welcome

My name is Marion Loree and I am the minister here at Melville United Church in Fergus, Ontario. We gather in community today - May 23, 2021, Today is Pentecost. The day which some consider to be the birthday of the church. It is the day described in the Bible as the day that inspiration of Holy Spirit came upon the followers of The Way - the way of love, acceptance and equality that Jesus had taught them.

We are meeting virtually because of Covid-19 restrictions. There will be no in-person worship services until restrictions have been lifted and we can ensure the safety of all who might attend.

So, I invite you to sit back and relax and let your heart and mind be open to whatever message Spirit may have for you today as we talk about the coming of the Spirit.

Announcements:

Acknowledgment:

We acknowledge with respect the history, spirituality and culture of the Indigenous peoples with whom Treaty 4 - also known as the Haldimand Tract - was signed and the territory wherein our church resides, and we acknowledge our responsibilities as treaty members.

Call to Worship:

Spirit of Joy - come like the wind, swirling among us, filling us with enthusiasm.

Spirit of Truth - come as the flame of Christ's light shining in our hearts and minds.

Spirit of Life - come as the breath of life, pouring energy and power into us.

Spirit of Hope - come from the four winds renewing hope in all creation.

Spirit of Love - come as our Comforter and Consoler, healing the broken and wounded.

Spirit of Wisdom - come as the light of understanding that respects and cherishes diversity.

Spirit of Peace - come as the winds of truth, kindling a passion for justice and peace.

Hymn: Come, O Holy Spirit (sung) MV 23

Come, O Holy spirit, set the Church on fire;
 strike it as the lightning hits a posing spire.
 Burn away the structures and consume the sham
 of our holy systems: Come, in Jesus' name!

Come, come, come, in Jesus' name!
 Take our hearts by storm.
 All the world lies open: Pentecost is now!
 I said a- come, come, come, in Jesus' name!
 Take our hearts by storm.
 All the world lies open: Pen-te-cost is now!

Blow away the cobwebs of our stubborn past.
 Come, send flying from us myths unfit to last.
 Wind of change, refresh us and disturb our calm;
 teach us what true love is, take our hearts by storm.

Come, come, come, in Jesus' name!
 Take our hearts by storm.
 All the world lies open: Pentecost is now!
 I said a- come, come, come, in Jesus' name!
 Take our hearts by storm.
 All the world lies open: Pen-te-cost is now!

Free us from the babble of our Babel minds;
 spark in us a language all can understand.
 Lighten then our darkness, come and show us how
 all the world lies open: Pen -te -cost is now!

Come, come, come, in Jesus' name!
 Take our hearts by storm.
 All the world lies open: Pentecost is now!
 I said a- come, come, come, in Jesus' name!
 Take our hearts by storm.
 All the world lies open: Pen-te-cost is now!

Words of Wisdom: - The Buddha

The thought manifests as the word;
 The word manifests as the deed;
 The deed develops into habit;
 And habit hardens into character.
 So watch the thought and its ways with care,
 And let it spring from love
 Born out of concern for all beings.

Opening Prayer:

We are the people of the dream-weaver;
 who put wonder into fjords, perfume into roses,
 and colour into laughter.

We are the people of the justice-maker:
 who finds the crack in every prejudice,
 stirs discontent into the oppressed,
 and puts voice in the throats of the silenced.

We are the people for the Spirit-guide;
 who knows the meaning of adventure,
 opens up the world to our imaginings,
 and calls us into it.

We are the people of the world; Source of Life,
 who know your voice, recognize your hand,
 and struggle to answer your call.

When we pray for peace, may our prayers not be of words but of actions.
 When we pray for justice, may our prayer not be of words but of choices we make.
 When we pray for food for all, may our prayer not be of words but commitment to others.
 When we pray for a greener world, may our prayer not be of words, but the lifestyle we choose.
 When we pray for the world, may our prayer not be of words, but how we live here.
 Forgive us and open us to living in Spirit- with the energy of life, with the power of truth,
 with the impatience of justice. Amen.

Words of Assurance:

In the days to come - it is our God who speaks - I will pour out my Spirit on all humankind.

Hear these words and open to the possibilities that are yours when your make Spirit your foundation for living.

Thanks be to God!

Ministry of Music: Solo - Jo-Anne Hall - Spirit of the Living God - Audrey Assad

Scripture: Acts 2:1-21 (The Inclusive Bible: The First Egalitarian Translation)
 (The Spirit comes on the day of Pentecost)

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 upon the name of our God will be saved.'

Message: Same Breath - Same Spirit

Acts 2:1-21

Did you know the original meaning of the word "conspire" means to breathe together? Take a breath. Now blow it out again. There! We have just launched a conspiracy.

Science tells us that all the air that ever was keeps recirculating between the surface of the earth and the protective veil we call the atmosphere. That means that we breathe the same air that the dinosaurs did. That means that we breathe the same air that Plato breathed, and Mozart and Michelangelo - and Hitler. Every time we breathe, we take in what was once some baby's first breath, or some dying person's last. We take it in, we use it to live, and when we breathe out it carries some of us with it into the next person, or tree, or animal, who uses it to live.

In Scripture, one of the images used to describe Spirit is 'breath' of God. I like to take the image that science holds of the air we breathe and use it to describe the concept of the presence of Spirit. We could say that Spirit is to our spiritual selves what air is to our bodies - it is always present; it is necessary for life; and it connects us to each other and every living thing.

Today in the church we celebrate Pentecost. It is a day that has been called the birthday of the church. It was an event that inspired the followers of Jesus to want to spread the good news of God's love everywhere they went to everyone they met. All the people were gathered together

and they experienced a presence so palpable that it was described as wind and fire. Whatever it was, however it was experienced, it was to change them forever. Somehow they all understood - in their own languages - the message of God's love.

And it was a radical message - this idea that God's love was for everyone. It wasn't just for the educated, for the leaders or for those earmarked as teachers. It was for all of them. They all felt the power equally. It was such a remarkable and strongly felt experience that some of those watching responded with mockery. "They are drunk" some said, "They have drunk too much wine." Others were bewildered, amazed, perplexed and still others were probably intrigued.

Regardless, all indications are that something dramatic happened to those gathered that day. Somehow the Spirit blew and burned it's way into their hearts and psyches so that they were inspired to go out and begin preaching all over the land about the wondrous love they had seen exhibited in the man they knew as Jesus of Nazareth.

So the church was born. The church, whose purpose it was to spread the good news of the gospel - to tell and show the world how much God loves it. They soon came to be known as 'Christians' or followers of 'the way' - the way of Jesus. It was dangerous in those days to claim the title 'Christian' as one would most likely be persecuted, if not killed for one's beliefs. But the Spirit instilled in them was so strong that they were willing to risk even their very lives to live it.

Over time the message spread throughout the land around the Mediterranean but we can imagine, in the days before telephones and internet that the 'teachings' began to get clouded. It ended up that each little pocket of believers had their own versions of the 'truth'. They were Christians, yes, but without close contact with other Christian groups each had developed in different ways and, after a time, arguments arose between the various factions. Arguments about the nature of God and who Jesus was and what rules should be followed and whose ideas were right or wrong. The basic experience and message had begun to get lost.

These arguments went on for over 300 years until the time of the Roman Emperor Constantine. He became convinced, because of a vision during a battle, to become a Christian himself and, of course, that meant that Christianity had to become the official state religion for everyone.

Constantine was also a smart ruler who knew that a unified religion would help to keep peace throughout his empire. So, in 325 CE, he ordered all the various Christian leaders to come together to work on standardizing the beliefs and to decide which of the many writings circulating at the time would be considered the correct ones for teaching the faith. This event is known as the Council of Nicaea (because that is where it took place). It was the beginning of the institutional church, that is, the church with set rules, beliefs and sacred texts.

Now here we are in 2021. Almost 1700 years later. This institution is very old. Could it be that it has lost sight of its original purpose in favour of the rules, doctrines, rituals, theologies and ways of doing things that have developed over the intervening centuries? Being in existence for so long, it could very well be said that the church has become pre-occupied with its own survival.

There have been times, of course, when it appeared that the Spirit was again moving to create a new thing in the church. The Reformation, for instance, during the 1500's was a time when Calvin and his contemporaries saw that the church needed reform and decided to do something about it. It was a time of excitement, of change, of upheaval, of schism, and of chaos until the new order got sorted out and people, once again, knew what the new 'normal' was. It didn't happen overnight and it was very painful but great change happened and we, in the present day protestant churches are the legacy of the 'protestors' of that time.

I believe the Spirit is at work in the church again. I think the Spirit is nudging us, no pushing us, to do something radically different. I think the Spirit is saying that the time of the institutional church as we know it is over. I think the Spirit is trying to be heard and felt over and above all the rules and rituals and legalism. I think the Spirit is wanting to breathe new life into us all over again.

Now, no one likes change, including me. Part of me wants to go back to the good old days when belonging to a church was expected and the pews were filled and the Sunday School was bursting at the seams. But part of me also knows that that is not possible. Part of me knows that if we are to be true to our purpose as the Christian church then it is not re-vitalization that is needed but radical change. Even the Covid-19 pandemic has shown us that by forcing us to find new ways of doing things, some of which we should have probably been doing already.

There is no escape. As I repeat at every funeral service I lead, God is the Source, the Life Force or energy of the Universe, the Spirit of Life, the Love from which we *cannot* be separated. There is no place we can be where Spirit is not and if change is in the wind, it will happen in spite of us. Just like those original followers of the Christ, we need to feel the Spirit blowing in and among us, firing up our hearts to creatively and enthusiastically discern what needs to happen next.

The Spirit is moving again, like it has many times since that first Pentecost event. It is moving among us like a great wind that will show us how we are to continue to spread God's love into the future. We need to let it re-ignite a fire in our hearts, a fire that burns with the love of God.

Are we ready for a new Pentecost? Why not? Same breath - same Spirit!

Thanks be to God. Amen.

Preparation for Prayer:

As we prepare our hearts and minds to enter into a time of prayer I invite you to sit comfortably and quietly for a moment. Breathe deeply a few times paying particular attention to your breath as it moves in through your nostrils and fills your lungs. Picture your breath as a light entering your body and filling it with love and relaxation. Then when you exhale imagine the breath taking all your tensions and worries with it as it leaves your body. Do this a few times until you feel relaxed then move on into the prayer time.

Silent Preparation:

Prayers: (beginning with "Flaming Love" -Bruce Sanguin, If Darwin Prayed)

O Holy One,
 we gather to rediscover fire -
 kindled by an ember that flew from the great radiance,
 Love's bright beginning
 in time and space -
 flaming forth now in us.

May our own Spirit-fanned words
 and the thoughts of our hearts
 become love's flames,
 tongues of forgiveness,
 sentences of justice,
 declaring the good news:
 that Wisdom burns
 in the heart of this cosmic adventure.

Pour out a Pentecostal blessing upon us;
 transform our babbling into a syntax of blessings,
 a proclamation that the world is ablaze with your glory,
 that we are suffused in spirit,
 and that all creation is awaiting
 our arrival as your sons and daughters -
 fire, now shape-shifted into conscious future-forgers -
 willing to reveal and realize the kin-dom of God.

Our prayers continue as we pray for our brothers and sisters of Crediton/Zion Pastoral Charge and for all those who work on our behalf, filled with Spirit, in other parts of our country and the world.

And we pray for ourselves as we search inward to share the things which trouble us, which concern us and which fill us with joy. Hear the prayers of our hearts.... (silence)... today we pray for peace in the Middle East; we pray for healing of all nations; we pray for an end to the pandemic; we pray for your Spirit of love to enter every heart with healing.

We offer these and all of our prayers in the name of our brother, Jesus the Christ, who taught us to pray together as a family of faith saying... Our Father...

Lord's Prayer:

Our Father who art in heaven,
 hallowed be thy name,
 thy kindom 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 kindom, the power, and the glory
 forever and ever. Amen.

Offering:

If you would like to do your part by making a monetary donation to Melville United Church, there are a number of ways to do that.

1. *Cheque (post-dated cheques are welcome): made payable to Melville United Church - which can be mailed to the church at P.O. Box 41, Fergus, ON N1M 2W7 or put in the mail slot beside the parking lot door.*
2. *Donate online through the Canada Helps website
<https://www.canadahelps.org/en/charities/melville-united-church/>*
3. *Call Lynda, to arrange Pre-Authorized Remittance payments (PAR).*
4. *E-transfer directly from your bank. E-mail to secretary@melvilleunited.com*

Offering Prayer:

For all that we have received; for all that we know; for all that we are - we give our thanks. We bring our offerings and gifts as tokens of our heartfelt gratitude. May they be used to bring peace, love and joy to those who need it most. Amen.

Hymn: Spirit of God, Unleashed on Earth **VU 207**

- 1 Spirit of God, unleashed on earth
 with rush of wind and roar of flame!
 With tongues of fire saints spread good news;
 earth, kindling, blazed its loud acclaim.
- 2 You came in power, the church was born;
 O Holy Spirit, come again!
 From living waters raise new saints,
 let new tongues hail the risen Lord.
- 3 With burning words of victory won
 inspire our hearts grown cold with fear,
 revive in us baptismal grace,
 and fan our smoldering lives to flame.

Blessing/Sending Forth:

Go into the world in the truth and beauty of God's love.

Go, knowing the presence of the Holy Spirit is in you.

Go, as advocates of justice and peace.

Go, to live in the way of the Christ. Amen.

Postlude:**Prayer of the Week:**

God of wind and fire, in community with those I love, connecting with them at least in spirit, may I find genuine enthusiasm today for the work laid before me. May I share your wisdom, care, and creativity. Set me on fire. Amen.