

Sunday June 4th, 2017
Pentecost Sunday

PRAYER: God at Pentecost, we have gathered together in one place. Let us hear a sound coming from heaven like the rush of a mighty wind. Let your Spirit fill this house. Send your tongue of fire on each of us, and we will sing your praises and do your will.

WORDS OF ASSURANCE: Nowhere in creation can we escape the boundaries of God's loving care. God is present in our greatest joy and undergirds us in our deepest sorrow. Accept the forgiveness of God through Christ our Saviour. Face the darkness and light of your day with the trust that God holds you close, never to let you go. Amen.

STEWARDSHIP: Every good and perfect gift comes from God, our Father. Out of God's abundance we have experienced spiritual and material blessings beyond measure. Out of that same abundance we offer back to God our tithes and offerings as an expression of our gratitude for all that God has done. The ushers will now receive our gifts.

PASTORAL PRAYER: Pentecost...the seventh Sunday after Easter. How delighted we are, O God of the world, to discover that the empty tomb was not your final act in your drama. The last curtain didn't come down after the Emmaus walk. What came down was your Spirit-not swooping down like a dove as at the river Jordan, but rushing like a mighty wind and burning like sweet tongues of fire. And when your Spirit came upon your disciples, you had the final word, eternally spoken. It sounded like: "For I so loved the world..."

Your love amazes us. Unlike human love, it shows no partiality. Your eye watches over the people of all languages and lands; your hand lifts the inhabitants of all countries and colours. Unlike human love, your love is not earned. Your help extends to the sinner and the saint; your voice beckons to the wicked and the good. Unlike human love, your love does not fail to forgive what is condemned. Your face shines to the condemned that their ways might change; your ear hears the whispers of their hearts better than their own.

We pray that you would make us worthy, Lord. But you do not ask the impossible. So, instead, we pray that you would make us wise, that we might see what is possible. Help us absorb the light that shines in the darkness. Help us to breathe in your Spirit that inspires the weak. Then we shall throw open the shutters and rush from the upper room into the streets. And the whole world shall wonder at our words and our deeds. Some may mutter, others grumble; but some shall see and be glad. They shall hear and rejoice, for they shall know that you are our help.

Today we honour relationships and so we honour spouses, mother's grandmothers, fathers and grandfathers, and all other mentors and caregivers who have given of their hearts, their resources and in some cases their very lives to protect, nurture and guide us. We call out to you today, O heavenly Father, that you bestow the great gifts of your Holy Spirit on the families of our community. We ask that love might replace indifference, meaningful employment replace poverty, health replace sickness, hope replace despair, friendship replace loneliness, and community replace isolated families.

There is so much more we need to speak to you about the condition and struggles of not only our own families but families we know and care about. So, we lay our burdens for families on you gracious God, for you have promised that you will make our burdens light. We trust that you will make those families that seek to serve you faithfully, into beacons of light in communities trapped in the cycles of violence, injustice and faithlessness.

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Bring renewal, refreshment, and peace to this troubled world, dear God, and let it all begin in the homes represented here today.

As we continue to worship and meditate on your scriptures and message today, we ask for a greater sense of fellowship with each other and with you through your Son Jesus the Christ, in whose name we offer this prayer and our lives. Amen.

BENEDICTION: Receive now the Holy Spirit. You are sent out by the Son, as the Son was sent by God. Do not travel alone, but go two by two and three by three. And do not go with empty hands, but carry the peace of God wherever the Spirit leads. Amen.

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Numbers 11:24-30 and 1 Corinthians 12:1-13
“God’s Gifted Program.”

There are few dates in my life’s history, where I know exactly and in some detail where I was and what I was doing. I know where I was and what I was doing on August 18th, 1984; I was getting married in Binbrook. I know where I was and what I was doing on November 28th, 1989; I was witnessing the birth of my son Joshua. I know where I was on August 13, 1991; I was in the Hawkesbury Hospital witnessing the birth of Rachel.

There is one other date that I shall also remember with great clarity; as I am sure many of you will. I know where I was, and what I was doing on September 11, 2001. I remember that it was a clear sunny day, and I was busy cutting the grass at our farm house in Selkirk. I remember it, because I wasn’t at my task very long, before Laura came out to tell me that an airplane had crashed into the World Trade Towers in New York.

I immediately went in the house to see the live video on the television of the smoke pouring out of the tower and tape recordings of the crash, but went back to my grass cutting; only to have Laura return to tell me a second plane had hit the other tower. I am afraid, after that news my grass cutting for the day was essentially over. Like millions of others, I sat glued to my television watching the smoke pouring from the towers and later the Pentagon; all the while wondering what in the world was going on.

One plane crashing into the tower was a terrible accident, but two on the same day? Like so many others, I too, found myself growing anxious about what I witnessed, especially as the towers collapsed and a great flood of debris swept through Manhattan. Later my anxiety grew as hundreds of flights worldwide, were canceled. I became very concerned when I remembered that my parents were in the Mediterranean on a cruise, and it might be several weeks before they could fly home.

As the events continued to unfold, I must admit, like millions of other parents, I also considered going and getting my kids from school. It was very clear within a matter of a few minutes that this event was no accident; to that fact, most of us were sure. We longed for answers, and in time we longed for action. Perhaps we didn’t want all the beefed-up security at airports as we took our shoes off and could not take bottle water on the plane, but “better safe than sorry” we agreed.

In the weeks, and months that followed, we learned a new word, “al-Qaeda”. We also learned about a shadowy character named Osama Ben Laden, whose execution was eventually carried out with military precision in Pakistan. The official conclusion was that terrorists had struck at the very heart of western capitalism. With incredible planning, groups of men, had hijacked four planes fully fueled and proceeded to kill thousands. That’s the story; or is it?

Not that long ago I read a very insightful book called, “Among the Truthers” by National Post reporter Jonathan Kay. If you’ve never heard that label before, Truthers are people who do not accept the official version of major events.

Truthers, as a group, question authorities and governments, casting doubt on official conclusions by investigators. Jonathan Kay writes that most Truthers are middle aged men, and even

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presents a provocative theory that becoming a Truther is a symptom of a mid-life crisis. Some men, Kay states, buy a sports car, or have an affair; while others become Truthers.

Specifically, many Truthers believe that the US government planned the 9/11 event as a pretext to invade Iraq. The Truthers' claim is that government agents planted explosives in the towers to bring them down. They argue that no plane, even fully fueled, could do such damage. Some Truthers even claim that the planes were remote controlled like *Predator Drones*, and at least one Truther claims that no plane actually hit the Pentagon.

You may feel such a position is ridiculous, but with the advent of the internet, the number of believers is growing. Truthers are also the ones behind questioning: President Obama's birth certificate, the JFK conspiracy, anti-Semitic conspiracy plots, concerns about vaccines and many other ideas about how the general public has been deceived. Truthers do not trust scientists, politicians, or any other traditional authorities.

Many famous and well educated people are Truthers. Donald Trump is a truther. Suzanne Summers, and Sarah Palin are just a few of those you might have heard of before. I raise this with you because; Truthers are a serious threat to our society, at least according to Jonathan Kay. The perpetuation of grandiose conspiracy theories, through: books, lectures, radio programs, and the internet, cast doubt on any sense of objective truth. The complex, and often twisted logic of Truthers, is eroding confidence and blurring the lines of objective journalism.

Being that this is Pentecost Sunday, I wanted to remind us all, that one of the ministries of the Holy Spirit, according to the Apostle Paul, is to grant us discernment to know what is true. (vs. 3) Let me point out to you that the ability to discern the truth, particularly about God, is a gift from the Holy Spirit. Discernment is one of several gifts granted by the Holy Spirit for the benefit of the church as a whole.

I do not believe that Paul intended to give us an exhaustive list of gifts in 1 Corinthians 12, but he highlights some critical ones. The Holy Spirit gives for the benefit of the church: the ability to give wise advice, the gift of special knowledge (insight), special faith (meaning a faith that seems above our normal level, the power to heal, the ability to prophesy, to discern whether it is the Holy Spirit or another spirit at work, speaking in unknown languages (tongues), and the interpretation of these languages.

Paul writes that there are different ways that God works in our lives, but God remains the same. I take this to mean that God is incredibly creative in working in and through us to minister to and strengthen his church. There is no set formula. What works for one person to meet their needs, probably won't work for someone else, but not to worry; God has a unique plan for them as well.

The gifts we receive are not for our own personal use, or glorification. These spiritual gifts are for the benefit of the whole church. The celebration of Pentecost is a recognition that, as Christ's followers we were never intended to go it alone. The Holy Spirit grants me gifts to use to build up you; grants you gifts to build me up; and gifts so we can all build each other up. Implied here is that we need each other; especially, if we are to live a full and abundant life.

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This is what Pentecost teaches us and also our Christian experience teaches us. The sharing of spiritual gifts with each other is our purpose as a church. The gifts of the Holy Spirit are recognition that we depend fully on the grace of God, expressed in our Christian fellowship. Tony Campolo, a noted Christian sociologist, evangelist, and writer, talks about a very special moment in the life of his home church.

These are his words, *“I belong to a large African-American congregation in Philadelphia that for decades was pastured by Dr. D. W. Hoggard. When he died and the congregation sought a new pastor, I was amazed to discover they had selected a young man who was just graduating from seminary.*

I couldn't believe it. I told the chairman of the deacons that a large church like ours should have somebody who was experienced. I told him that we needed somebody who was a great preacher! The response to my inquiry taught me something about what the church can be when it is at its best. The old deacon looked at me and said, “Then we're just going to have to take this young man and make him great!”

Campolo concludes, *“What a wonderful attitude. The deacon was aware that a pastor's effectiveness is largely dependent upon what the people in the congregation enable him or her to be.”* (Campolo- Let Me Tell You a Story, pg. 163) I think this same truth applies not only to clergy, but to all of us. The effectiveness, of each of us, in ministering in the name of Christ, is largely dependent on the: nurturing, training, support and prayer of the fellowship as a whole.

No greater misconception has ever been expressed than the sentiment that you don't need to go to church to be a Christian. Perhaps that is true; we are saved by grace, not by works. However, I am sure that you will not be an effective Christian for the cause of Christ, unless you dwell among God's people. You will never reach your full potential for Christ, unless you minister to and are ministered to by God people on a regular basis.

If we truly want to know what the truth is, then we need to be among God's people, because someone among us can give wise advice and a special knowledge. If we need healing or some other miracle, we need to be among God's people. If we really want to know, if God is the one speaking to us or some other spirit, then we need to be among God's people. If you need those gifts, and do not possess them yourself, then you will find them among God's people.

I shall be very bold here, but I am convinced that you cannot be at your best for Christ without fellowship. Walking through life all alone, we will tend, no matter how faithful we think we are, to: bend, change, twist or set aside many aspects of God's truth. Walking the Christian life alone is impossible, because none of us can hold all the truth, all the experience, and as mentioned, all the gifts, on our own.

The greatest achievements for the betterment of people in the church and I believe in the world, have all been made because the person leading the charge had other faithful people surrounding them with encouragement and prayer. Such was the case for William Wilberforce, who pushed the British Parliament to abolish slavery.

At one point, early on in the struggle, Wilberforce was very discouraged and about to give up.

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His elderly friend, John Wesley, the noted preacher and hymn writer, heard about his troubles and from his deathbed called for paper and pen, to send Wilberforce a letter. With trembling hand, Wesley wrote, *“Unless God has raised you up for this very thing, you will be worn out by the opposition of men and devils. But if God be for you, who can be against you? Are all of them stronger than God? Oh, be not weary of well-doing! Go on, in the name of God and in the power of his might, till even American slavery shall vanish away before it.”*

Six days after writing that letter, Wesley died. But Wilberforce fought for forty-five more years and in 1833, three days before his own death, saw slavery abolished in Britain. Do you see the power of a brother or sister in Christ, stepping up to encourage us, or correct us, or even heal us? Would Wilberforce have stayed the course, to see his fight to end slavery succeed, without Christian friends surrounding him?

Think about your own life now. How many challenges have you faced that threatened to shatter your hope, only to discover your brothers and sisters in Christ rallying around you? How much strength was offered to you because they: lifted you up in prayer, sent you a note of encouragement, paid a visit, brought a meal, and a whole host of other caring ministries? One of the revealing things I have learned over the years is the nature of what most people truly fear.

Most people I have dealt with in hospital, or in long term care facilities, do not fear: illness, even terminal illness, or the ravages of aging. Most people I talk with fear only two things when faced with their mortality. They fear pain, which can be managed by medication and they fear ...being alone. So many times, I have visited folks in hospital, or in a care facility, and they express appreciation for their church family.

Inevitably, at some point, they express how they don't know how people without faith cope with such experiences. I don't know the answer to that one, either. What I have seen are people of faith, surrounded by a loving church family, go through some pretty rough experiences, and yet do so with confidence and yes, even sometimes joy. Surrounded by loving Christian brothers and sisters, there is a confidence that the world does not understand.

Lying in a hospital bed, on medication, facing surgery or even death itself, Christ's people declare together, “No despite all these things, overwhelming victory is ours through Christ, who loved us.” (Rom. 8:37)

The world shakes its head in disbelief when in the midst of even the worst situation God's people repeat the words of the Apostle Paul in Romans 8:28, “And we know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose.” Notice Paul says, “We know”. It is our experience as followers of Christ that all things work together for good.

Not some things, not 50% of the time but all things. Such confidence! But we know there are times when our confidence is shattered, and when we feel less than victorious, what the?

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Paul writes, “If one part suffers, all the parts suffer with it, and if one part is honoured, all the parts are glad.” (Rom. 12:26) We are in this together. If someone is without confidence the rest of us are confident for them.

If they haven't words to pray, we shall pray. This is the gift of Pentecost. The resources and power of Christ are made available to us together, as his body. Did you know that the true meaning of the word “prophet” means someone who brings a message from God? Did you know that we all can be prophets? As Christ's body, we incarnate his love and grace and bear them to others.

With our presence, and our compassion and our love, we bring God's message of hope to each other. We need each other. We want to be with each other, because together all things work for good and we are together more than conquerors.