

Sunday May 19th, 2024
Pentecost Sunday

PRAYER: Give thanks to God, O my soul, and all that is within me praise God's holy name. We come, O God, to give you honour and glory. We gather to bless you for your countless gifts. Alive with your Spirit and made whole by Christ's love, we praise your name. The heavens portray the extent of your wisdom; the earth is full of your handiwork. We join in creation's song, lauding your name with the glad praises we bring. Amen.

WORDS OF ASSURANCE: The prophet Joel declares that in the last days God's Spirit will be poured out upon all flesh. "All it shall be that whoever calls on God shall be saved." Know that as you call on God's name, Christ intercedes on your behalf to deliver you in righteousness, blameless before God.

STEWARDSHIP: With God's Spirit within us we pour out our gifts in his presence. May God take us and use us as he sees fit. Where speaking can bring a sense of God's righteousness, we offer our voices to proclaim his will. Where our efforts can free others from bondage, we offer our strength to help in time of need. We bring ourselves to be used for Christ's sake. May God show us the way, and we will respond.

PASTORAL PRAYER: O Gracious, loving God, you know us far better than we know ourselves. O how we love to make grand claims about our own achievements. Our communities are littered with monuments to our own sense of greatness. In arrogance we think we are the key to understanding what this world is about. But it is all lifeless bones. No matter how far we go in our self-awareness and self-promotion, it is but dry and useless dust. Like the prophet Ezekiel we stand on the edge of our world and observe it full of symbols of the fallen and soon forgotten accomplishments of humanity. Our hearts break at the level of violence, injustice, poverty and general human misery that plagues us all, and we wonder, can these bones live? Is there still hope for us?

O how we want your wind to blow; your Spirit to move among us. For you, to turn our lifeless achievements into declarations of your presence among us. We thank you for the sounds of these dry bones rattling. For your presence working in all corners of the world. How your Spirit is inspiring men and women to feed the hungry, heal the sick, and bring hope where before none existed. We thank you for your eternal call to your children to prophesy over these dead bones of the world. To call regularly and faithfully to the powers and principalities to stop their unholy thirst for control at any cost. A call, to put an end to the crushing weight of prejudice. A call, to wipe tears from the eyes of the distressed. A call to turn swords into ploughshares. Renew in us, O God our calling to prophesy; to speak on your behalf to this world. Renew our sense of hope, so that we may pass it along to others who have none.

O let your Spirit blow life into us. Let resurrection be the rallying cry of your people. Let us feel the loss of death's sting and the lost victory of the grave. If we are crushed today, by death dark shadow, raise us up. If fear lurks around every corner for us, grant us the assurance of your rod and staff. Let your Spirit pour out on us today in a way we have never experienced before. Let us see the miracles of your hand, at work among us, so there can be no doubt as to who is watching over us.

Let your Spirit come, O Lord, and gather in the lost sheep. If there is confusion, grant clarity. If sin has gripped us, grant us deliverance. If we have wandered far from the sheep fold, come and carry us back. Renew in us, the joy of our salvation.

Sunday May 19th, 2024
Pentecost Sunday

Call us to celebrate the wonderful, matchless, grace of Christ. We know it is not enough for your people to have their minds engaged in your kingdom, for you also require our hearts.

BENEDICTION: Holy Spirit, steer us from our path of destruction into the way of life. Sustain us as we go with the bread and the wine of the new world. Guide us to your beacon, endowing our ability and inspiring our will. Be our bridge over troubled waters and the step that moves our feet. And be ahead of us, among us, and behind us until our journey's end. Amen.

Sunday May 19th, 2024
Pentecost Sunday

John 15:26-16:15
“We All Need an Advocate”

In the category of being careful what you ask, I found this little cautionary tale. Dear Audrey Advice....My son is a strapping 265lb star linebacker at our local university and a leader in our church youth group. We couldn't be prouder of him! However, I returned from grocery shopping today and found him prancing around the house in one of my dresses. What should I do??! Sincerely, Confused in Texas. Dear Confused, this is really a delicate situation, but I'd have to say that you should start a diet immediately....

One of the most treacherous areas of life and relationships is the exchange of truth. To tell the truth to someone you love, and respect is a risky proposition. Think of those questions that a wife asks her husband that are so dangerous to answer. Like when your beloved wife tries on a new dress and asks her husband, “Does this make me look fat?” We can flip it around and worry for a wife who is asked by her husband if she likes the paint he chose for the living room.

I want you to think of someone who told you a truth about yourself that was difficult, uncomfortable, or painful to hear. Maybe it made you angry or defensive. Maybe it hurt your feelings. Maybe you wondered how she or he could be your friend and say that kind of thing. It is also quite possible that your friend or family member who was so honest with you, hurt you so deeply that the relationship suffered and maybe even ended.

But later you began to recognize the truth of what was said, no matter how difficult it was to hear, and it made you love and respect that person even more. Who has done that for you?

Think about a time when you could not stand for yourself. Maybe you didn't have the strength, courage, or confidence. Maybe grief and loss had broken your heart. Maybe you were so tired and fatigued you didn't know which end was up. Who was the one that came and stood next to you, held you up, and loaned you his or her strength and faith?

Who are the wisdom figures in your life, your go-to people, when you're lost and confused, when you need to regain your center and balance? Who are the ones from whom you hide nothing and to whom you entrust everything?

Let me give you some examples of what I'm talking about. When I was a student minister at First Baptist Welland Ontario, in what seems like a lifetime ago, I was given an assignment to preach at the evening service. I was excited at the opportunity as I had not had many opportunities and was really wanting to see if I could handle it. Well, I prepared my message and delivered it with as much authority and vigor as I could.

After the service, people were gracious and said nice things and then Laura and I headed back to Hamilton to begin our week. The following week, my supervisor, the late Glenn Barrett, pastor of the Welland church, had me in for our supervisory session after the morning worship. He said he wanted to talk to me about my sermon from last Sunday. In my arrogance I believed I was in for some compliments, but I was dead wrong.

Sunday May 19th, 2024
Pentecost Sunday

Glenn reported that he had been stewing about speaking to me all week. Glenn proceeded to report to me that my sermon was horrible. Several folks who heard me complained to him. Their complaint was not about the content but for the way I presented it. I came off as very arrogant, using pronouns like “you”, instead of “we”, as if the lesson did not apply to me as well as the congregation.

It was very hard for Glenn to be blunt with me. I admit that I was at first angry and disappointed, but I quickly saw the wisdom in what he said. I also conformed the truth of what he said when I re-examined my notes.

It was risky for Glenn to be so honest, but I needed him to be so. The lesson that week, very early on in my student days served me very well, and I have never forgotten what he said. For 37 years as a pastor, I have tried to be very conscious of making sure that whatever lesson I am trying to make, I include myself in it. I use “we”, “our” and “us”, far more than “you”. For many years now, as I am preparing a sermon, I hear his voice reminding me to include myself, in whatever pronoun cement I feel I must make.

Glen is just one and many others just like him, who were brave enough to speak truth to me even if it was costly to do so. All of us need the kind of people like a Glen in our lives. Who are those people for you? In what ways did they show up? What did they say that you will never forget? What did they do that made a difference? What are the things about them for which you will be forever grateful?

Anyone who knows me knows that Laura has been such a person for me for decades. Calling me out when I have gone too far, joked too much, or been unobservant to what is going on right in front of me. Deacons and church members have over the years called me out on all manner of missteps, at sometimes a personal cost of any warm feelings I may have had for them, because there was a greater good at stake.

How have you been such a person for someone else? Setting aside wanting to be liked to speak a hard truth to someone you love and who you want to see thrive and grow? Here is a story that is becoming all too frequent of late.

Jim has dementia, he says he can't think like he once did, he's 'not as sharp'. Jim was befriended and abused. Staff at the local bank noticed that Jim was being brought in regularly by neighbours. Large amounts of money were being withdrawn, this left Jim without enough money for food and bills. Advocacy Matters (Social agency in the states) provided Jim with an Advocate, a listening ear so he could talk about what was happening and take action to change his life.

Jim told the Advocate that he was hungry and frightened. He explained that he thought the neighbours were his friends, but they had brought paperwork and had bullied him into signing. Jim did not understand that he had given his neighbours power over his property and finances. He told his Advocate that it was not what he wanted. Jim instructed his Advocate to act for him.

The Advocate worked with the police and the local authority to protect Jim and others.

Sunday May 19th, 2024
Pentecost Sunday

The police investigated Jim's situation as a crime and the local authority worked with Jim and his Advocate to stop the neighbours taking any more money. Jim's Advocate was there with him on his side, supporting him throughout a difficult and frightening time. Jim told his Advocate that he didn't know what he would've done without her.

This stories I told you about my life and others and the ones I am asking you to recall in your lives are stories of Pentecost. Listen and you'll hear in them the "native language" (Acts 2:8) of God being spoken. You'll hear the rattling of dry bones coming together in the traditional Old Testament lesson for Pentecost. In the valley of dry bones, "bone to its bone" (Ezekiel 37:7). You can feel a fresh wind blowing and taste the "new wine" (Acts 2:13). But I think there's more to those stories and people.

In today's gospel lesson (John 15:26-27; 16:4b-15) Jesus talks about the coming of the Advocate, the Helper, the Spirit of Truth. What if each of those stories you and I have just told, is a story about advocacy, truth telling? What if those people are our advocates? What if the Advocate, in whatever ways she or he shows up, comes not to advocate to another on our behalf, but to advocate to us on our own behalf?

They are truth tellers for us. They call us more deeply into our authentic selves.

They are the ones who transform and change our lives. Sometimes that means they create conflict, disequilibrium, or speak uncomfortable truths. Other times they comfort, encourage, or console. Either way they are guiding and accompanying us into life and really, abundant life. These dear souls seek no gain for themselves, rather, they invest themselves in us for us. They are a gift of God, a gift of the Holy Spirit.

They are the wind of change that blows through our valley of dry bones (Ezekiel 37:1-14). They rehydrate the dry and desiccated marrow of our lives. They keep us accountable to ourselves not only for what we have done and left undone, but also for all the possibilities that lay before us. They remind us that we are not a dead end. They open us to our future by helping us to "see visions" and "dream dreams" (Acts 2:17).

Across our country are hydro generating stations. Some are like the one at Niagara Falls which uses water to pressure to generate incredible amounts of power. We also used to have coal plants like at Nanticoke where water was heated by burning coal to produce power. There are also nuclear power plants, and more recently there are wind and solar installations generating power. All this infrastructure in order that I can turn on lights and cook my supper and many other tasks.

If you manage to be near a large generating facility, you will notice hundreds of big towers all connected by thick metal wires that carry the power away from the station. Tons and tons of power flowing out from the plants. But I cannot take my power directly from a station. To do so would literally burn my house down. Instead, the power makes it way to substations when the power is "transformed" into more manageable levels to be used by consumers.

Without these transformers the power is useless to us and incredibly dangerous. The Holy Spirit, the Helper is like a transformer. The holy, pure truth of God, taken in its fullness and purity

Sunday May 19th, 2024
Pentecost Sunday

would be too much for us to handle. So, the Holy Spirit takes what truth we need and tailors it for everyone. That truth transmitted by the Holy Spirit to us is customized to meet our personal needs. The transmitted truth may come directly to us, or it may come by way of an advocate.

We are always in process, always becoming our truer selves. And we need others to do that. We need advocates, truth tellers, and marrow re-hydrators, to stand with and beside us. No one does this life alone. Regardless of what we've been told or come to believe there is no such thing as a self-made man or woman. Someone has stood with those who achieve great things. And someone has stood with you and me.

Who are those people for you? Picture their faces. Call out their names. Offer your thanksgiving. And then open yourself to the next ones who are coming to you.

Pentecost is the promise that today someone is standing with you whispering in your ear, knocking at the door of your heart, and taking you by the hand, to "bring you back to the land of" yourself (Ezekiel 37:12).

She or he is here today. They'll come again tomorrow and the next day and the day after.