

Reveling in the Spirit unleashed!

Psalm 104: 24-34, 35b; Acts 2: 1-21

Pentecost Sunday, what many associate with the birth of Christianity. It says in the scriptures that the apostles had gathered in one place and many followers with them when suddenly the heavens opened and there was a rush of wind and the appearance of fire upon the gathered believers. It was reported by those that were watching that the Holy Spirit had filled them and suddenly they began to speak in their own language and yet at the same time they understood what others were saying in theirs. The bystanders felt that they were truly revelling in the Spirit. So much so that the bystanders began to wonder if maybe they had partied too much, were drinking too much, were too full of a certain type of spirit.

But then Peter, who was standing among them, began to explain: We are not drunk, but this is the fulfilment of what the prophet Joel said who proclaimed that God will pour the Holy Spirit upon the people. They will be given dreams and visions and will bring God's kingdom to fruition. The people whom you presume to be drunk are speaking of how God is working in our world. How God is creating; bringing harmony to everyone gathered. A safe place where we can be ourselves, our true authentic selves in honesty as we praise God and are blessed with what we have received.

For the Gospel writer Luke who is also attributed with writing the book of Acts the story of Pentecost is in direct contrast with the story of the Tower of Babel. Now back in Genesis, chapter 11, in the Old Testament, or what some of us refer to as the Hebrew scriptures; after the flood had happened and the rainbow had appeared and God had promised a new covenant, Noah's family grew and multiplied and grew and with this came one language, one common purpose. People wanted to make a name for themselves and so they made bricks from stone and bitumen so that they could build a tower that reached the top of the heavens. Babel literally means 'gate of God'. God says that because the people were all together that nothing was impossible for them. Humans as we know were created in God's image and their purpose above all else is to trust in God. What the people were doing in building the tower was in direct violation of this trust found in their independence and through their self-confidence. So, God chose to make them babble and in Hebrew this term could also mean 'confuse'. God confused their tongues. They began to speak in different languages and because of that they went with people they understood, and they were scattered around the world and they left the tower unfinished.

“For Luke, Pentecost represents the in-breaking of God’s purpose for all humanity. Brining all humanity together in understanding to spite their differences. Furthermore, Pentecost tells us the good news that our humanity, ruined and distorted in our distrust has now been restored through Jesus Christ.”¹ So how does Jesus do this? It is through the power of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is the living presence of God poured on humanity; the fiery, love created community where only strangers once stood. So, you might be asking yourselves what does this mean for us today? What is being witnessed today is the Trinity at work. And when I speak of the Trinity, I am speaking of the 3-in-1, God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit. What we have come to believe is that God is not only over us and for us, but also is at work in us and around us. “The Holy Spirit is God’s presence in our lives and God’s presence at work in the world and most importantly God’s power to create and renew communities and social structures.”²

Now let me be clear the Holy Spirit is at work and moves to enliven structures that have grown rigid and sometimes self-serving, but the Holy Spirit does not disregard nor discard the past or traditions like old trash. It does not disregard the past promises of God, but rather fulfills them in ways that are unexpected and disruptive of established orders. In this God’s wisdom is revealed through the diversity that is brought together through love. God has created us to be in relationship with one another; to be in community. Even more than that God has created us to be in communion, which goes one step deeper. Communion assumes difference, but not conformity.

The story of Pentecost that we heard today depicts a world where even with our differences we can live and work and be in communion with one another and all of creation. Supporting one another to be our authentic selves. The major issues that we face in our world today is how to achieve communion with one another or used as barriers as a way of keeping us separate. Let’s be honest, we fear difference. We fear otherness. We fear the strangeness of ‘stranger’ and that is often what is our biggest barrier. But today we celebrate our commitment as a congregation to being affirming and in honor of this we acknowledge the beginning of this pride month and pride week in our city.

The United Church of Canada provided a pride affirmation that I would like to share with you because I think it captures the Spirit of which is at work in and among us. The Spirit that we hope to move forward together with. It says this,

‘I believe that we are more than children of the Holy. I believe that we are more than clay. I believe that we are more than flesh. Flesh that is warm and sweaty, soft and hard. In us is embodied the soul of the Divine. Calling us to love, embrace and share the kiss of peace. Statements of love. Jesus was flesh, but more than flesh. Jesus was universal word incarnate, animated by the Holy and responding to the needs around him. We are animated by the Holy. We are animated by desire and attraction. We are

¹ Michael Jinkins, *Feasting on the Word*, Year C, Volume 3, (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010), p. 16.

² Anthony B. Robinson, *What’s Theology got to do with it? Convictions, Vitality and the Church*, (Virginia: The Alban Institute, 2006), p. 136.

*animated by Holy love. When we touch it is more than desire; it is the longing for affirming the other, affirming one another, affirming ourselves. We are more than pride we are called to be our authentic selves; flesh that is warm and sweaty, soft and hard, for we are animated by Holy desire.*³

So, what is the Holy Spirit up to. The Holy Spirit is calling us to learn what it means to be ourselves and to truly be an ally to one another to people who have been cast out, oppressed and silenced. Being an ally is not simply being a good person. In the book entitled, ‘The Person You are Meant to Be: How Good People Fight Bias’ the author says,

*‘we redefine what it means to be a good person as someone who is trying to be better as opposed to someone who is allowing themselves to believe in the illusion that they are always a good person.’*⁴

The reality is we are not perfect, we have all made mistakes. If we are striving to be better people, that is what we are being called to be about as an ally. To not place our own assumptions on other people, our own desires on other people, but to create space, to create that umbrella that holds people in a space that is safe, where we truly listen for what is needed, for what they care for, for the hurts they have experienced and for the healing that they long for.

Being an affirming church, it is not enough to simply put our flag outside or our flag on the communion table, but it is about calling people be in communion with one another. Acknowledging, respecting and loving the diversity that comes with all the people that God has created; with all our warts, with all our goodness, with all our quirks. We are all lovingly made by God and important to creating a place where all nations are brought together. Pentecost is about bringing people back together in love; unconditional love that does not place judgment on others. So, in this time of Pride let us remember that we are called to affirm one another; to know that you are each a precious gift given to us from God and it is the Holy Spirit that is bringing us together and calling us out. So, go out into this world with the rush of the wind and the fire that is impassioned and making you want to do something more. Be in this world and be yourself.
Amen

³ Rev. Don Uhryniw, Emmanuel United Church, Peterborough, ON, The United Church of Canada, www.united-church.ca

⁴ Dolly, Chugh, *The Person You Mean to Be: How Good People Fight Bias*, (HarperCollins Publishers) Kindle edition, p. 8