

The Liturgy for May 31, 2020
Celebrating Pentecost!

~Thought for Meditation:

Is it not a measure of the strength of our church that we admit and recognize deep differences, rather than follow a party line? At the same time, scripture calls us to come to agreement with each other, even if that means agreeing to recognize our differences. Lois M. Wilson

~GATHERING:

So, hi everyone! Today we are continuing on from the last two Sundays, where we addressed the question: “What happened in those days after Easter and the resurrection, and when did Jesus depart...and our resulting conversation of the Ascension of Jesus. So, that was Day 40 after the resurrection - for those keeping count. But, as Bill Cox reminded me one day when I apologized for sending out a Wednesday Musing on the Thursday: “Why apologize Kelly...we hardly know what day it is anyways!” Thanks for having my back Bill!

But we do acknowledge the counting of days, as we enter today’s story, which is Pentecost. The long 50 days of Easter has now officially ended. Time to put away the Easter eggs. If you are feeling festive the colour of Pentecost is red, so decorate and dress accordingly!

~LIGHTING OF THE CHRIST CANDLE

~CALL TO WORSHIP

Leader: The joy of Pentecost be with you!

People: And also with you!

Leader: Let’s worship together!

~OPENING PRAYER ENDING WITH THE LORD’S PRAYER

O God, in whom we live and move and have our being:

From generation to generation we have gathered in prayer and song.

On this birthday of the church, when nothing is the way it was, we *still* give thanks for your care and guidance throughout the journey.

More than ever, we seek the re-newing and re-finishing fire of the Spirit to impel us into our future.

Come, Holy Spirit, come.

Breathe into our hearts this day.

Bless our worship, whether online or in print, and inspire us,

That we may live Spirit-filled lives of love and compassion for all.

And now we pray together, in the way of Jesus, saying:

**Our Father who art in heaven,
Hallowed be thy name.
Thy kingdom 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 kingdom, the power and the glory,
For ever and ever. Amen.**

~Scripture: Acts 2: 1-12

When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.

Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each. Amazed and astonished, they asked, ‘Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language? Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabs—in our own languages we hear them speaking about God’s deeds of power.’ All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, ‘What does this mean?’

~Reflection:

On *that* day, the 50th day after the Resurrection, Luke tells us that a strange and holy thing took place...

It was something like a loud wind;

It was something like a blazing fire...

this wild Spirit of God that was blowing among the people,
It was something like people talking...in so many ways and so many
languages..

Or perhaps it was more like all the people could understand this wild spirit
language...

Whatever it was that happened that day in Jerusalem, people were talking,
and they kept talking.

Kept telling the strange and holy story, of how the church was born: some
2000 plus years ago.

And people are still talking about that church that was birthed 95 years ago
(well June 10th 1925 to be exact): The United Church of Canada. It came to
be when 3 denominations: The Methodists, the Congregationalists and most
of the Presbyterians, and a fourth stream actually, if you count the Union
Churches of the West, all came together. These denominations had dared to
begin a conversation years earlier about the possibility of forming a new
“united church.” A church that would be representative of the Protestant
population of this young country, this Dominion of Canada; a church that
would stretch, in their vision, from Canada’s shore to shore to shore; a
church that would unite the Protestant Christians of Canada much the way
the railway was uniting this young, but oh so spread out country.

And after years of conversation and debate, of argument and trials, of talking
over big things and trivial minutiae, by an act of Parliament the United
Church of Canada was formed.

And celebrated by a grand worship service: a stately liturgy was drafted by
committee of course (38 page bulletin printed on fine vellum). Glorious
music and polished prayers. And a stirring processional from three
directions was orchestrated to signify the three streams forging together.
And where was this glorious service held? Why, in a hockey arena of
course: Mutual Street Arena in Toronto. We’re Canadian, eh?

Well, where else would you be able to seat 8,000 people?

People from all over Canada representing all the former streams would be
included to sing and pray and preach a new thing into being. It’s rather an
astounding thing, when you think about it. It’s hard enough to bring an
ecumenical worship service into being, let alone truly merge denominations
together into a life-long union, a marriage if you will. We have a saying in
the United Church: where 2 or 3 are gathered, there you will find 4 or 5
opinions. We are a wide tent.

Every stream had its own traditions and governance and women’s groups
and ways of holding a ham supper... Not to be trifled with!

But when it was realized that the new church was really going to happen, the
founders had to buckle down and determine what exactly this church would

look like theologically, sacramentally, liturgically. Ultimately we are a little something of a mash up. A blending of many ecclesial DNAs. We are a church based on that which each denomination found was critical to them for going forward.

So, from the **Congregationalists:**

We get our sense of freedom: freedom of thinking that we are known for; not being constrained by a strict adherence to a creed. It is God's word sets us free.

From the Presbyterians:

Strong emphasis on good conduct, higher education and the centrality and beauty of preaching.

From the Methodists:

They brought us a sense of deep spirituality as well as a love of hymnody and community singing -thanks John Wesley!

From the Union Churches

We get our strong leanings toward ecumenical and inter-faith work, i.e., gathering with other denominations and faiths. This was born of practicality when sparse and wide spread prairie population pockets made it sensible to gather with folks who happened to live near by, rather than worrying about what particular points of theology you carried.

This spirit is truly fundamental to how we formed. We state in our Basis of Union, our birth certificate if you will, that we are a united and uniting church. Did you catch that? **Uniting.**

As in On-going. Not static, or one-time only. We believe in "organic union," a natural and unforced joining where we allow the Spirit of God and our love and care for one another bring us together. Or not. For over 30 years (from 1944-75) we were in talks regarding union with the Anglicans. Who knows what the future may bring....

Some call this open and welcoming style, this lack of strict hard line beliefs to be a weakness. But I see it as following the very heart and way of Jesus, who calls us to love our neighbour, to feed the hungry, to seek out anyone and everyone in need. Jesus never asked anyone to believe or sign off on a particular belief before he would enter into relationship, before he would help.

From the earliest of days the United Church of Canada began to see a shift from personal piety to social justice. They saw the need for reform when it came to Labour relations and gender justice. Where other denominations are *still* calling for women to be silent in church, we began ordaining women in 1936. And our shifts and growth continued, as we claim that neither race nor gender nor who we love can keep us from leadership in the church.

The United Church is always changing because we are listening to the Spirit's call: to the rush and roar, or the still small voice, that calls us always forward and always towards the needs of the community. That is the true basis of our union: the wild and faithful call of the Spirit to be followers with a strong foundation and a holy vision for our own time and place. Happy Birthday Church! Amen!

~A few words of departure

~Closing Prayer:

We do not know exactly when we can gather together in worship, O, God.

So, for now we ask that:

When we sing along in our kitchens to an old song on the radio,

may it be counted as praise, as hymn.

And when we read the news and our hearts tighten in our chests,

may it be counted as a *Kyrie* – Lord have mercy.

When our eyes brighten in a smile behind our community masks as we thank the cashier,

may it be counted as thanksgiving.

When we water our plants and wash the dishes or take a shower

may it be counted as remembering our baptism.

When the tears come and our shoulders shake; when our breathing falters,

may it be counted as prayer.

And when we each sit at our table, and eat one more homemade meal,

slowly, joyfully, with nothing else demanding our time or attention,

may it be counted as holy communion.

Amen.

~The Benediction