

## Happy Birthday!

Today is a special day! It's special for a number of reasons:  
It's special because in the liturgical calendar, today is Pentecost; the day when The Church was born.

The Hebrew Scriptures assigned for this day talks about the Tower of Babel. God in those days, used to come and stroll around, checking out Creation, saying hello, etc. And everyone spoke the same language. Fabulous!

One day, the "Powers that Be" decided that they should build a tower as high as the sky so they could "make a name for themselves" and go visit God whenever the mood took them. This did not please God. So God said to them, "Um, hello? Everybody? This is God. Don't build the tower. You can talk to me whenever you need to. It's called prayer. Please don't build a tower.

And did they listen? Of COURSE they didn't. If they had listened we wouldn't be telling this story.

So, the people continued building the tower, and soon it reached the sky. Once again God told them to take the tower down.

The people did not listen. So God took matters into their own hands. The tower fell, the people were scattered and everyone then spoke different languages, wherever it was they settled. This story was told as a cautionary tale for many generations. In fact, if you wanted to look it up, it's Genesis 11.1-9.

Today, we heard the story of Pentecost where the people gathered together. It says they were all together in a house, but I believe the translation would have been an enclosed area. Let's imagine a stadium or hockey arena.

They were all gathered together and a violent wind descended from heaven. It filled the space with tongues of fire. This fire did not burn, thankfully, as a tongue of fire landed on each person and suddenly, even though people were gathered from the corners of the known world,

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. (Acts 2:9-11, NRSV)

Today that may sound similar to Ukrainians, Czechs, Romanians, Germans, Russians, residents of Poland, Argentina, Nigeria and Norway, both believers and non-believers alike. And suddenly everyone is able to understand the language of the person who has been speaking to them – even though they come from different areas.

It's a fantastical tale, to be certain!  
What does this have to do with Happy Birthday?  
I'm so glad you asked!

Today, Gabriel Lawrence is being introduced, formally, to his Parish Family. Now, it would be safe to say that we have known Gabriel and Felicity for a few months now. Today is not about introducing Gabriel to God. You see God has been around from the very beginning.

When Gabriel came suddenly into this world, ahead of schedule, God was with him, in the NICU, keeping him calm and safe as the doctors and nurses did their very best. Gabriel doesn't need to be introduced to God. They're old friends...well, um...long-term friends.

Today, Felicity will be making promises on behalf of Gabriel because he's not quite old enough to speak for himself. Lauren and Matthew are Gabriel's Godparents and they, too, will make promises on behalf of Gabriel. The congregation of Fernie Knox United Church and Christ Church Anglican will also be making promises on behalf of Gabriel.

And as y'all know, I'm a bit hard of hearing. If I cannot hear your answer, I'll simply ask you again. And as the service will be projected on the screen, y'all have NO excuses for saddo answers. I want vibrant, I want hair blowing, I want PENTECOST answers.

Gabriel will experience several things today...he will paddle his feet in the water. He will splash in the water. I'll hold him like a football and baptise him, with three handfuls of water. I'll make the sign of the cross on his forehead, then his Godmother Lauren will be presented with his baptism candle, which will be lit from the Christ candle.

Symbols are central to our faith. Last week we learned some of the history of the sacrament of Communion or Eucharist. We learned that both the United and Anglican Churches recognise the sacraments of Communion and Baptism.

The water that is poured is ordinary tap water, quite potable and safe. Through the words of blessing it will become the water of new life. Gabriel will not be born again, nor will he be washed clean of sin. He's far too young to have committed any sins...

The water is symbolic of the womb, where he spent many many months hearing his mother's voice and heartbeat. He was roused into breathing air earlier than expected and I imagine he was non-too-pleased with this.

And yet now, he's happy to be on this side.

The water represents purity. It represents new beginnings. It represents the ability to be clean and fresh and new.

I will make the sign of the cross on Gabriel's forehead. That represents the cross on which Jesus died. Gabriel has not heard the story of Jesus' death and resurrection as often as we have. So this symbolic gesture is to show him and to remind us that we have a common faith, that Jesus was nailed to a cross so that we could know eternal life.

Lauren, on behalf of Gabriel, will receive a lit candle which will represent the light of Christ. This candle can be lit every 5th of June, the anniversary of Gabriel's baptism. It can be lit on his day of birth - 25th of September. It can be lit whenever he is feeling apart from God and needs some visible reminders that he is now, and has always been, God's beloved child.

Gabriel will be "presented" to the congregation. Not person to person, but he will be lifted safely into the air, kind of like the Lion King, and with any luck he'll show you his Platinum Jubilee wave. He was practicing it yesterday at his rehearsal.

Felicity will receive a certificate of Baptism for Gabriel. Lauren and Matthew will each receive a certificate as Godparents for Gabriel.

And finally, Gabriel will receive a Storytelling Bible which is illustrated from artists around the globe. If you go online you can download the stories narrated by the late Archbishop Desmond Tutu, of Blessed Memory.

These stories are the stories of our foundation as followers of Jesus. These stories are told in approachable and entertaining ways.

I hope they will become part of Gabriel's reading repertoire...until he's at that age where everything gets tossed and thrown. Then you might want to put it away for a bit, as those edges look very sharp!

With time, Gabriel will learn what his faith means to him, just as we have spent time in our lives understanding and living our faith. My greatest wish for Gabriel is that he learns to question those things which do not make sense to him. That he will honour his Mother, as the Bible intends, yet he will also be curious of the world around him and never lose that childlike innocence that most of us were in such a blasted rush to outgrow.

I think, one of the things that has caused the depression and isolation and general state of "ick" that the world is experiencing is that we are so busy being adults and fretting about things over which we have no control, that we forget to stand still and be present.

I met Father David for tea the other afternoon, and we sat on a grassy median in the parking lot at Tim Horton's setting the world to rights. We each had a lawn chair on which to sit, Thumper was comfortably relaxing in the driver's seat and as we chatted I noticed a bright green bug crawling on my leg.

I put my finger close to the insect, and it climbed on. I lifted it up and moved my hand as it walked over and between my fingers. I was absolutely fascinated. Suddenly I heard Father David say "Isn't that right?" And I replied, "Sorry, I wasn't paying attention." I handed the insect over to Father David and he took his turn watching in wonder.

Some people call that mindfulness. Some people call that sitting with your inner child. I call it being still and observing with wondering eyes. No matter what, or whether you assign a label to it, I found it fascinating and fun. I don't know about you, but I don't spend nearly enough time in wonder and awe.

In the reading for today, the crowds who are hearing the common voices are shocked and rather than react with wonder and awe, they react with "logic" and impunity. "All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, 'What does this mean?' But others sneered and said, 'They are filled with new wine.'"

*(Acts 2.12-13, NRSV)*

Peter replies that those present cannot be drunk because it is still morning.

Then Peter, remember our Peter? He reminds the crowd of the prophet Joel who forecast this day coming, when all would understand one another. When wondrous things would happen because God had declared it so.

And so, my friends, it's time for us to show Gabriel what it is to live into the fullness of God's love as a Child of God. Yes, that's right. Each and every one of you are God's own beloved children. Loved more today than yesterday, yet not as much as you'll be loved tomorrow.

As we make these promises on behalf of Gabriel, remember that those promises apply to you as well. Listen carefully...and be reminded that you are a beloved Child of God.

Let the Church say Amen! Alleluia!!

The Rev'd Canon Andrea L. Brennan,  
Regional Dean, East Kootenay Region  
Incumbent, Elk Valley Ecumenical Shared Ministry  
Fernie Knox United & Christ Church Anglican, Fernie, B.C.  
Sermon for Pentecost and Baptism - 5 June 2022 – Acts 2.1-21