

31 May 2020 – Day of Pentecost
Birth of the Church

For many of us the Day of Pentecost is, well, weird.

The middle story in a triad of weirdness.

Last week Jesus ascended in bodily form with a “see ya later”, promising that the paraclete, comforter, Spirit of God would descend and remain with the faithful until the day that Jesus returns.

Okay. So last week was the Ascension. This week is the, what? Descension? Is that even a word? This Holy Spirit? Where is she from? Is she a new thing?

In a word, nope.

You see, the Spirit of God, or in Hebrew, RUAH (Spirit, Breath or Wind) was at the very beginning. In the book of Genesis the Spirit of God began the process of Creation. She swept and cut and moved and created. From the beginning. Then she was busy with other stuff, you know, breathing life into the first creature...HA'ADAM, the Earth Creature. And then we don't hear too much about her. Trust me when I say, she's been around.

In the first reading today, from Numbers, the passage starts part-way through the story. If we back up a little bit. The faithful have been complaining to Moses. “Are we there yet?” They are tired and weary. They are complaining because they haven't any meat to eat in a long while. So Moses goes to God and explains the predicament. God says gather 70 leaders from the faithful. I will send my Spirit upon them and they shall be consecrated.

Oh, and while I'm at it, they'll have meat. Not just for a day or a week, but for an entire month. They'll have meat until it is coming “out their nostrils”. Moses reminds God that he's got six hundred thousand people walking with him. They are hungry and thirsty and cranky. God says to Moses “Do you think my power is limited? Hey, watch this.” So Moses gathered 70 of his best leaders and they were consecrated in the sight of God. They were made sacred in the eyes of God and in front of their community.

The Spirit of God was there when Jesus was baptised.
She landed in bodily form on Jesus. A dove. On his shoulder.
Rest assured, her appearance isn't new.
However, with Pentecost, when she showed up, she did so with a new purpose. Not to create, but to re-create.

Let's imagine, for a moment, the day of Pentecost. We get some windstorms here in the Elk Valley. Sand and grit get thrown up, whirlwinds of dust swirl around and trees shake and howl. That was nothing compared to this storm. It is described "like the rush of a violent wind", which filled the house. Imagine the sound...WHOOSH. WHOOSH! WHOOSH!!!

You can't catch your breath for the violence of the wind. Then, as if that weren't enough there were divided tongues, as of fire, which landed on each of them. The Spirit, well, she gave each of them the ability to understand the other.

All those strange and foreign languages were understandable. She entered them and enabled them to not only understand each other's languages, but to speak them as well.

Now, people being people, some balked at the idea that suddenly, they could understand each other. Some folks scoffed that they weren't hearing what they thought, that those who were speaking in other languages were drunk. Then they were reminded it was only 9:00 in the morning. Peter reminded the gathering that God has promised, through the prophet Joel, that this would happen.

To roughly paraphrase Peter, he said "there's going to be some weirdness, the Spirit of God will fill you with her Spirit and she will give you the words to say. Young men will see visions and old men will dream dreams. Men and women will be given opportunity to speak through the Spirit. She will fill all them with her love and peace and hope and joy". In short, it will be the best day ever.

The past couple of days I've been folding butterflies and listening to podcasts by Michael Curry, the Presiding Bishop of the Episcopal Church. And podcasts by Nada Bolz-Weber a Lutheran Pastor from the U.S. Bishop Curry speaks of The Way of Love. Reverend Bolz-Weber speaks of the Confessional. The need to speak truth to power. To speak of the deep, dark secrets we carry inside.

And in giving them access to light, they cease to have power.

As I was folding nearly a hundred butterflies I was praying, and thinking, and writing, and pondering, and figuring. Then it struck me...as we are moving through this liminal time of Good Friday, is it to make way for new birth?

IF we are resurrection people, we must believe that there is life after death, right?

IF we are a resurrection people, we must not fear death. Right?

We keep hearing in the news that British Columbia, Canada, the United States, the World is re-opening. I heard the Churches are re-opening a few times in the past week and every time I heard the phrase it enraged me.

Then I figured out why...in between listening to podcasts, folding butterflies and gluing my fingers together...

Church has never been closed.

The buildings have been shuttered. And will remain so for awhile yet. Yet the body of Christ remains as it always has been. Surrounded by the pneuma, the Spirit of God, the RUAH, the breath, the Wind that moves in and through and around us. Sometimes **despite** us, she moves on and around and under and through.

What if, COVID-19, has given us the opportunity to re-imagine Church?

What if, isolation, has given us the opportunity to figure out who we truly are?

What if, in this liminal time of Good Friday, we have been yearning for Pentecost, moreso than Easter because we are ready, not only for resurrection, but for rebirth?

The reality is, what we knew 11 weeks ago, is gone. And it will never be that way again. Or if it does return to how it was, it will not be for a very, very long time. No longer days or weeks, or even months, but years.

We must continue in our relationships with one another and with the Divine. For some of us we are fortunate enough to be able to connect online through Email, Facebook and Zoom. For some of us, we gather, not in person, but in Spirit, at 10:00 am MDT, light a candle and pray.

We are not yet able to share in the sacrament of Communion. And I don't know when we will again, and I yearn, I ache for that time.

I had hoped, when we first decided to move to Worship online, that it would be a stop-gap until we could gather again in person. That once we unlocked the buildings it would go back to how it was. That's not going to happen.

I believe there is a need for community that has been discovered and in some cases re-discovered online. We cannot let that go. We need to find ways to continue to feed that need and create community online, even once we gather again in person.

When we are able to gather again there will be multiple safety devices in place:

A sign-in sheet so we know who has joined us and how to reach them, if, God forbid, there is an outbreak.

We will need to wear masks.

There will not be corporate singing in the building.

We will receive the tithes and offerings at the back.

We will not exchange the peace or gather for coffee hour.

There will not be parish potlucks, or communal meals.

Life, as we knew it, has changed.

Which means we must also change. We must adapt. We must learn.

Which means we must remember the two greatest commandments: to love God above all others, and to love our neighbours as ourselves.

Always choose love. Whenever there is a choice between love and hate, choose love. Not the Hallmark, Disneyfied, sickly-sweet, golly shucks love, but the down and dirty, hands in the mud love of those whom society sees as disposable and unloveable.

Love for the poor, the downtrodden, the outcast, the sex worker, the addict. Love for the single father, the runaway, the law maker and the law breaker. Love for the homophobe, the racist, the sexist, the dregs of society that you absolutely cannot stand yet are commanded to love.

Maybe, just maybe, this is the time for us to stand up as the body of Christ, emboldened by the Spirit who has been promised to and remains with us. It would be true to say, of the Holy Spirit, that she's got some gumption.

Now, the butterflies...I made nearly 100 of them on Friday and Saturday. 30 went in the Pentecost Porch Drops and others are at Knox United and Christ Church. Why?

Well, I'm so glad you asked. I spent time on Wednesday and Thursday measuring both worship spaces to see, just how many folks we can fit in the pews. The province has said no gatherings of more than 50. Guess how many we can fit, maintaining the six foot radius at Christ Church. At Knox United?

Each of them can hold no more than 27 people. I have two photos to show you, each of the Worship spaces adorned with butterflies signify where we can sit. You may notice yellow sticky notes. They are the names of the faithful who gather. And as you will see there are many yellow sticky notes together, which will not be possible when we gather again in person. At least, not for awhile.

Butterflies are symbols of new life. The caterpillar doesn't simply change, she absolutely transforms from a creepily-crawling creature, into a sac of goo in the cocoon, into a delicate and breathtakingly beautiful creation of God. She cannot see her wings so she has no idea how beautiful she is. And yet, she transforms and reminds us that even through the worst storms, through the hardest times, life remains.

Perhaps Pentecost this year is to remind us that the Spirit of God remains with us. She's been with us from the very beginning. And she is here to stay. To guide, to guard, to protect. To celebrate. And most of all, to love.

Dear God, may it be so.
May we learn a new way.
Show us how to be your Church in this world.
How to remain connected and re-connect.
Show us your way, your will, your love for us.

Amen.

The Reverend Andrea L. Brennan
Pastor, Priest and Prophet
Knox United Church & Christ Church Anglican
Fernie, British Columbia

Number 11.23-30
Acts 2.1-21
John 7.37-49

Christ Church "after" Butterflies



Knox United "after" Butterflies

