



Pentecost 2020

My Brothers and Sisters in Christ;

One of the most beautiful hymns I have ever heard is *Veni Creator Spiritus, Come Holy Ghost*. It is sung, most often, at Pentecost and at Ordinations. I remember being asked to sing it at St. Paul's Cathedral in London, Ontario the year before I was ordained. I knew the Ordinand and being asked to sing a capella was exciting and terrifying simultaneously. The night I was ordained to the priesthood at that same cathedral I heard the melodious lyric:

*"Anoint and cheer our soiled face, with the abundance of thy grace;
keep far our foes; give peace at home: where thou art guide no ill can come",*

and at that moment I was transported to a place of deep peace and grace. All the fears I had; of imperfection, of disappointing God simply vanished as I began to understand that loving God is enough. That if we follow in the footsteps of the One who created us, sustains us and loves us, we will be enough. And together with God, there is no single obstacle too great to bear. With Christ, all things are possible.

We find ourselves in challenging times. Who would have thought that just over nine weeks ago, we would find ourselves shut out of our beloved buildings? In that time we have found new ways together for worship; though Zoom, email, Facebook and other forms of social and electronic media. Some of us are not connected and were gifted with a Porch Drop on Palm (Cedar) Sunday that contained some worship and prayer resources, a letter, a worship schedule, a palm cross and a candle; the idea being that we could gather at 10:00 am, the time we are gathering online, to worship, not in person, but in spirit.

It is strange worshipping in an empty Church.

Every Sunday since the 29th of March I have driven to Knox United and presided worship by Zoom. It's been a steep learning curve, but I think we are finally getting some semblance of structure and order. After completing worship, I observe a brief time of silent prayer, then I drive to Christ Church where I record my sermon to my phone, then pray through Morning Prayer, either from the Book of Common Prayer or Service of the Word.

The churches feel cold. They creak. The wind rushes and the trains rumble and whistle. Something is missing. The music. The laughter. The people. God's children.

In both Churches I have put small yellow sticky notes at the pews where folks traditionally sit. Soon I will be measuring six feet of space and putting up butterflies to indicate where we may sit when the time comes that we are permitted to gather again.

Right now it's looking as though it will be the Sunday after Labour Day, when we cautiously gather again in person. There must be a re-opening plan in place. There must be safety precautions taken, such as wearing masks, no exchange of the peace, no passing the plate.

No Communion. I've heard it said that this is a time of Eucharistic fasting. Except, fasting is something that is chosen. This was not chosen. This is a time of Eucharistic **exile**. I am of the opinion that, until we are able to gather together, we must not partake in the sacrament. We celebrate Communion together, or we do not celebrate at all.

Please rest assured that your Joint Church Committee, Knox's Board and Christ Church's Church Committee have been working diligently in figuring out what to do. We must be faithful to the Spirit, and also keep one another safe. In the words of Dr. Bonnie Henry "*Just because we can, doesn't mean we should.*" Indeed.

The reality is that, the majority of our Parish, are folks who are defined as "vulnerable", i.e. those aged 60 and up. The majority of the clergy in the Diocese of Kootenay are in that category as well. As much as we wish to gather again and share in the fullness of worship and Communion, at this point, we simply cannot safely do so.

I am reminded of the reading from the Acts of the Apostles, for the Day of Pentecost. The faithful are gathered and there is a rush of wind as tongues of fire landed on each of them. Suddenly everyone present understood their "*own languages [they] hear[d] them speaking about God's deeds of power.*" All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, "*What does this mean?*" (Acts 1.11-12, NRSV)

Imagine being in a crowd where you cannot understand most of what is being said. The wind begins whipping around, sand and grit blowing about, making it difficult to see. As your eyes adjust to the strange light, you witness flames falling from the sky, and yet they do not burn anyone on whom they land. Some of it lands on you, and at once, you are able to understand what everyone is saying.

We live in interesting times. For the majority of us, we have not lived through anything like this. We are working these things out as we go, much like paving a street as we walk on it. It is frustrating, terrifying and exhausting. In short, we are doing the best we can with the resources we have been given.

Please know that you are being prayed for by our Parish Team. I may not have called you, yet you are in my prayers. I will be visiting some of you through the summer from a comfortable folding lawn chair, a chair umbrella and from a physically distant spot (driveway, lawn or deck). To schedule this, please give me a call. As much as I want to hug you, I simply cannot.

This summer will be unlike any other. I made the difficult decision not to go to Ontario in August. I am hoping I can go either in the Fall or next Summer. As much as I want and need to see my family, I simply cannot take the chance. I already find air travel stressful and anxiety-producing...doing so while wearing a mask, (I have claustrophobia) would be simply too much. My immune system is weak, as is my Mam's.

And so, I will take some vacation time and disconnect. I am taking two days of Sabbath every week in order to disconnect and take care of myself. I wish the very same for all of you. A time of peace, like that described in *Veni Creator Spiritus*.

*Teach us to know the Father, Son, and thee of both to be but one,
that through the ages all along, this may be our endless song:
Praise to thine eternal merit, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.*

My wish for you is a time to slow down, and appreciate the simple things in life: a glass of cold lemonade; a garden filled with fragrant flowers; a meadow alive with colour; the gurgle of a running stream; the giggle of a baby. All these gifts, which come from God, for God's holy and beloved children...for you...for us. And finally, remember to breathe deeply, wash your hands, and say your prayers, all for at least 20 seconds.

Your Servant,