

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, Thunder Bay

<http://standrewspres-tbay.ca> - Minister: Rev. Joyce Yanishewski

Day of Pentecost - May 23, 2021

Words of Welcome

It has been said that the Holy Spirit is the shy partner in the Trinity, but one wouldn't believe it from the story of Acts where the Holy Spirit is described as a violent wind and tongues like fire. Still in our time we find that people either don't talk about the Holy Spirit or are fixated on it. So what is this all about? If you haven't thought much about the Holy Spirit's work here is your chance. We begin with a call to worship.

Call to Worship

Breathe upon us, Holy Spirit,
and inspire our worship with your truth.

Stir in our hearts, Holy Spirit,
and fill us with your love.

Strengthen us, Holy Spirit,
and move us to act with your power.

Breathe in us, Holy Spirit,
and receive our prayers and praise.

In song we invite the Holy Spirit to be with us now and always.

Hymn

Spirit of the living God

400

1. Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on me.
Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on me.
Melt me, mould me, fill me, use me.
Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on me!
2. Spirit of the living God, move among us all;
make us one in heart and mind; make us one in love:
humble, caring, selfless, sharing.
Spirit of the living God, fill our lives with love!

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Prayer of Adoration and Confession

God of power and possibility,
With the flame of your Spirit, you give us energy
to move into the world in Jesus' name.
With the breath of your Spirit, you refresh us
to engage life in its complexity.

Your Spirit embraces us in our diversity
and invites us to find unity in your love.
We honour you for the gift of creation in all its beauty and bounty.
We praise you for your presence with us in every time and place.
In this time of worship, send us the Holy Spirit once again,
and renew us to serve you in the world,
the world that aches for the healing and wholeness you offer
through Jesus Christ, our Lord.

**God of mystery and mercy,
We confess that we have not always paid attention to the urging of your Spirit,
calling us to follow your will and your way.
Too often we claim to belong to Jesus,
but choose instead to ignore his teaching.
You created us to love you and one another,
but we fail to offer your love to those who differ from us.
Stir in our hearts and in our lives with your Holy Spirit.
Transform who we are,
and direct who we shall become through Christ's redeeming love.**

Holy Spirit, open our ears, our minds and hearts so that we encounter God's Living Word in the scriptures. May that Word change our hearts and inform all our actions in the example of Christ, our Lord. Amen.

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Assurance of Pardon

From Ezekiel (36:24-28), we hear these words,

"I will take you out of the nations;
I will gather you from all the countries.
I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean.
I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you;
I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh.
And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees.
You will be my people, and I will be your God."

Friends in Christ: by the power of the Spirit,
we are united with Christ and given a new spirit.
Live in the joy and peace of that assurance.

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Scripture Reading John 15:26-27; 16:4b-15

²⁶"When the Advocate comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who comes from the Father, he will testify on my behalf. ²⁷You also are to testify because you have been with me from the beginning.

⁴“I did not say these things to you from the beginning, because I was with you. ⁵But now I am going to him who sent me; yet none of you asks me, ‘Where are you going?’ ⁶But because I have said these things to you, sorrow has filled your hearts.

⁷Nevertheless I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Advocate will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you. ⁸And when he comes, he will prove the world wrong about sin and righteousness and judgment: ⁹about sin, because they do not believe in me; ¹⁰about righteousness, because I am going to the Father and you will see me no longer; ¹¹about judgment, because the ruler of this world has been condemned. ¹²“I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. ¹³When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own, but will speak whatever he hears, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. ¹⁴He will glorify me, because he will take what is mine and declare it to you. ¹⁵All that the Father has is mine. For this reason I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you.

The word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

Message Coming along side

There are some passages of scripture that are so rich with meaning and instruction that one cannot take in the depth and breath of it in a single message. This reading from John is one like that. The setting is the Last Supper, and this passage is part of what is called the Farewell Discourse. Jesus is spending these last moments with those closest to him. They do not understand the full extent of what is about to happen in the coming days with Jesus’ arrest, trial, crucifixion, and resurrection. They cannot anticipate, nor will they be able to really comprehend the Ascension, and Pentecost, as we know it was not even yet a thought for them in this moment.

Today the Christian Church celebrates Pentecost Sunday. It was already a Jewish Festival, and if one were to read from Acts 2 you would hear about how the Holy Spirit came with a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and filled the entire house where the followers of Jesus were gathered. They described it as, Divided tongues, as of fire, appearing among them, with a tongue resting 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. Christians think of this day as the birth of the church.

Now, Jesus knew that the Holy Spirit would come. In fact, Jesus says in the reading from John that he would send the Holy Spirit to them from the Father, God. In Acts we are told about the experience of the Holy Spirit being sent. In the Gospel of John, at this time before Jesus’ death, Jesus describes the work of the Holy Spirit. This reading also speaks to a wonderfully intimate example of Jesus compassion for those he loved deeply. The evening had already had its moments of confusion as Judas by this point had left the building to go do his deed of betrayal. On top of that, Jesus is talking about

leaving and sending. It must have been so perplexing and distressing. Jesus says, "...because I have said these things to you, sorrow has filled your hearts."

Jesus can't stop what is about to happen. He knows that a chain of events has been put into motion. He knows more than they do the fear, grief, and challenges they will yet face, but he also wants his beloved followers to know that he is not leaving them alone and feeling orphaned. Jesus is sending the Advocate, the Spirit of truth. The Greek word for this would be translated as "one who comes alongside." Jesus is sending the Holy Spirit to come along side them. The Holy Spirit will enter into the spaces and places of loss, abandonment, questioning and wondering, but also the spaces and places of joy, hope, and adventure. Come along side them as they find the courage and words to share and to testify to others about Jesus.

Another piece about the context of this passage is that just prior to what was read today, Jesus is talking about the world, in this case the world that does not accept that Jesus was sent from God. When we hear this, it is important to remember that God so loved the world that he sent his Son Jesus so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. (John 3:16) God loves the world, God loves creation and what has been created and that includes human beings. When Jesus talks about the Advocate proving the world wrong about sin and righteousness and judgement: it is about sin, because they don't believe in Jesus; about righteousness, because Jesus is going to the Father and the disciples will no longer see Jesus; and it's about judgment, because the ruler of this world has been condemned. Really this comes down to being in relationship with God and one another.

Jesus, God, the Holy Spirit as one, desire to be in relationship with us and when we ignore or disregard that relationship we ignore and disregard God's love for us, finding ourselves living more and more into what the world wants from us. The truth is, the world lives for itself, not for others. We live for the sake of relationship with God and others, and the Holy Spirit is with us, comes along side us, as we navigate the world, as we listen for our Advocate and guide to speak truth from God.

This all sounds like serious business, as this story is told in a time of distress, of unknowns and hard truths, but there is also the joy, the hope, and the comfort that Jesus knows will be part of the work of the Holy Spirit.

Let me tell you a story about Fred Rogers of Mister Roger's Neighborhood, who was also a Presbyterian Minister. Now all ministers are required to take courses on preaching, and like many of us in our learning, Rogers ended up listening to another person preaching while he was in seminary. Hear the story in his words,

Year ago my wife and I were worshiping in a little church with friends of ours. We were on vacation, and I was in the middle of my homiletics course at the time.

During the sermon I kept ticking off every mistake I thought the preacher – he must have been eighty years old - was making. When this interminable sermon finally ended, I turned to one of my friends, intending to say something critical about the sermon. I stopped myself when I saw the tears running down her face.

She whispered to me, “He said exactly what I needed to hear.” That was really a seminal experience for me. I was judging and she was needing, and the Holy Spirit responded to need, not judgement.”¹

Just like Jesus would do in sending the Holy Spirit to those first disciples and followers to guide and to comfort, the Holy Spirit had come into this moment to comfort and guide the woman who heard just what she needed to hear that day. But the Holy Spirit was also at work in Rogers in that moment guiding him into truth. He heard exactly what he needed to hear as well, it just might not have come from the preacher, but it did come from his friend.

And that is the thing about the Holy Spirit, the Advocate is always at work, always coming along side people whether we recognize it or not. We can choose to be attentive to the work of the Spirit or ignore it, but the Spirit is always with us. Choosing to pay attention though is powerful, it is transforming, it is life giving. It means knowing that the whole of God goes with us, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

One could ask, where have you seen the Holy Spirit, the Advocate, the Spirit of Truth at work in your life today, last week, last month? Where is the rush of the wind or the calm breath of the Spirit at work in you? This is not something that you can see but it is as real as your breath, as close as your breathing in and breathing out. It takes no effort to be unaware of the Spirit’s presence as one has to pay attention, just as you don’t normally pay attention to each breath you take to know you are breathing.

Yet when we are paying attention, we give thanks for every breath, realizing its life-giving energy. The Holy Spirit is our spiritual energy, pointing us to truth, guiding us into life giving relationships and experiences. It does not mean that life will be easy, but it will be lived with meaning, hope, joy, love, and justice and purpose.

On this Pentecost Sunday, may you feel the presence of the Holy Spirit with you, the challenging and adventurous Spirit of Truth guiding you and enabling you to share Jesus as you know him with others. May you experience the Comforter bringing you peace and hope, Father God, the Son Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit coming along side you in love, and power, and grace. Amen.

¹ Larson, Craig Brian. And Leadership Journal. 750 Engaging Illustrations for Preachers, Teachers, and Writers. Baker Books. Grand Rapids, Michigan. 1996, 2008. P243-244.

Prayers of the People

Wind of the Spirit, blow through us and your whole church on this day of Pentecost:
Re-awaken our love for God. Let your flames warm our hearts with trust in Jesus
Christ and dare us to do great things in his name.

Wind of the Spirit, blow through us and renew our faith.

Wind of the Spirit, blow through us
and give us energy to serve you as the body of Christ working in the world.
Open our eyes to recognize needs for ministry and mission around us.
Open our hearts to welcome newcomers and meet those we do not yet know.
Open our hands to share in tasks that need doing,
and open our lips in prayer and praise.

Wind of the Spirit, blow through us and renew our energy to serve.

Wind of the Spirit, blow through us and give us understanding
for all those whose lives seem so different from ours *(Hold a brief silence)*

For those facing situations we've never encountered *(Hold a brief silence)*

For those with whom we've disagreed *(Hold a brief silence)*

For problems and challenges we face at home, at work,
and in the world still struggling with the effects of the pandemic *(Hold a longer silence)*

Wind of the Spirit, blow through us and give us new understanding.

Wind of the Spirit, blow through us and bring healing
for all who face pain or illness, discouragement or disappointment *(Hold a brief silence)*

For all who know sadness, sorrow, or grief *(Hold a brief silence)*

For those who face stress and pressure,
especially as they recover from the impact of the pandemic *(Hold a longer silence)*

Wind of the Spirit, blow through us and bring healing and peace.

Wind of the Spirit, blow through us
and bring us the compassion we see in Christ Jesus.
Blow through us and equip us to serve the world you love in his name.
Blow through us and refresh us as your faithful followers.
Unite us across our differences
as together, we pray the words he taught us:

Lord's Prayer

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours now and forever. Amen.

Invitation to make an offering

At Pentecost, God poured out gifts of the Spirit upon the church, to equip Christ's followers to bear witness to him throughout the world. We offer our gifts and our lives to God, so that the witness of the Church will continue with the blessing of the Holy Spirit in this generation and beyond.

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There are people from different churches and places following this service. I encourage each of you to present your offering to God this day to your church community.

If you consider St. Andrew's your church, regardless of where you live, would like to learn more about St. Andrew's, get involved in our ministry and work, or make a donation toward the life and ministry of St. Andrew's Presbyterian, in Thunder Bay visit our website at <http://standrewspres-tbay.ca> for more information or to connect with me.

God's grace comes to us through faith in Jesus and in the power of the Holy Spirit and so we sing of these things.

Hymn

I know not why such wondrous grace

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1. I know not why such wondrous grace
to me God has made known;
nor why, unworthy as I am,
Christ claimed me for his own,
but I know whom I have believed
and am persuaded that Christ is able
to keep that which I've committed
unto him against that day.
2. I know not why this saving faith
to me God did impart,
nor how believing in the word
brought peace into my heart,
but I know whom I have believed
and am persuaded that Christ is able
to keep that which I've committed
unto him against that day.
3. I know not how the Spirit moves,
convincing me of sin,
revealing Jesus through the word,
creating faith in him,
but I know whom I have believed
and am persuaded that Christ is able
to keep that which I've committed
unto him against that day.

Benediction

As you enter the week,
may you experience God's presence.
May you feel God pouring out the Holy Spirit
over your heads and your thoughts and the words of your lips,
over your hearts and your feelings and emotions
and your compassion for all others,
and over your hands and your feet
as you put into action all that God commands and asks of you.

During this week,
may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ,
and the love of God,
and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit
be with each of you; Amen.

~ posted on the Presbyterian Church of Canada website/resources for Pentecost