

A Meditation for June 5/22, 'Pentecost Sunday' – pg. 1

By the Rev. Warren Ball of Mt. Albert United Church

Hello and welcome to my meditation for this week, a meditation which features communion, so, you might want to have something to eat, and something to drink, at hand! Today is the great feast of Pentecost – the 50th Day in the Season of Easter and a special event about which we're going to hear and (I pray!) experience today. Come, let us open our hearts, minds and spirits to the gifts of God's Spirit that are at hand as we 'turn' to God in prayer:

Living God:

**release your Spirit in our midst,
that your breath of new life may open us to your will,
and empower us in your way, amen.**

⇒ Hymn suggestion: VU380 'She Comes Sailing on the Wind'

Today's Scripture reading: 'The Coming of the Holy Spirit' *from* Acts 2:1-21 (NRSV)

When the day of Pentecost had come, all the disciples were 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. 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 the disciples speaking their language. Amazed and astonished, they asked, "Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we hear them speaking about God's deeds of power?" All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, "What does this mean?" But others sneered and said, "They are filled with new wine."

Peter, standing with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed them, "Men of Judea and all who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and listen to what I say. Indeed, these are not drunk, as you suppose! No, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel: 'God declares, in the last days I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams. Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.'

Sermon: 'She Who Is'

Blow now through our midst, O God, as once you blew over the face of nothingness and began everything! Kindle us anew with your creation, then reveal to us your beloved will, amen.

Today is Pentecost Sunday, a festival, or feast, that Christianity simply adopted, or took over, from the ancient Jewish festival of First Harvest. In the warmer, Mediterranean climate of the Bible, they had (and have!) the first harvest around this time of year, and then the feast of the second harvest around our Thanksgiving in the fall. Of course, the Hebrews don't call this feast, Pentecost, no, that's a Greek word ('Pentecostarium') to honour the Great Fifty Days

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that is the Season of Easter. Rather, the Hebrews called First Harvest, 'Shavu'ot,' and it's a time set aside to thank God for providing.

Providing ... well, at Pentecost, we remember that God provides two things in particular! First of all, at Pentecost, we remember that God has provided the Christian church – today is the birthday of our tradition! Secondly, at Pentecost, we remember that God has provided the many wondrous gifts of the Spirit. And those two provisions come together in the most marvelous of ways. For example, the Christian church, and God's Spirit, have brought us here to this one place from all the many different places that we all call home. Today, the Christian church and God's Spirit would give us a common purpose when we're likely to have different opinions about any number of things! Pentecost is about the life that moves in our midst, and gets all caught up with our breaths, and who we are, and whose we are, and what we're called to do.

Pentecost is also what takes all those frail, brittle human words in the Bible, words that are sometimes so loaded with such different values that they might just as well have come from Mars, and turns those many words into God's single Word of life. You see, today's reading from the Acts of the Apostles may not on the surface appear to have much to do with us, with all that talk about languages that we can't understand, and astonishment, and the rush of wind, and sneers of doubt ("Oh, those people must have been drinking!"), and the power of visions. But all of those very different things are exactly why we need God's Spirit!

God's Spirit is what the words 'ruach' and 'shekinah' point to in Ancient Hebrew, the language in which our Old Testament was written, words that mean God's 'breath' and God's 'presence.' God's Spirit is also what the words 'pneuma' and 'Sophia' point to in ancient Greek, the language in which our New Testament was written, words that mean the spirit and wisdom of God. Now then, here's THE BIG thing about all of that: all four of those words (ruach/breath and shekinah/presence in Ancient Hebrew; pneuma/spirit and Sophia/wisdom in Ancient Greek) are feminine in gender – feminine! Which is why one of my very favourite theologians, Elizabeth Johnson, wrote a great book entitled She Who Is which is all about those sides of God's multi-faceted, communal nature.

As it turns out, the spiritual reality to which She Who Is points is important – no, it's desperately important! – to correct, and counter-balance, the patriarchal and misogynistic values that have shaped life in the Western World, including our Christian tradition. Patriarchal as in a system that gives more power and status to men than women simply because they were born male. Misogynistic as in a system that sees women as second-class citizens and holds an unfair bias against them. Patriarchal, male-centred; misogynistic, anti-female – is that what God wants? I sure don't think so!

And, so, it is on this Pentecost Sunday that the 'She Who Is' is looking to blow through these words, and our lives, in order to open up whole new possibilities with her magic breath! Ah, but, I wonder, is there a problem with that claim? Do we have a problem here because, well,

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just think of the extremism, terrorism, and violence throughout the world in this 21st Century? I mean, how can I talk about the magic of God's Spirit, the She Who Is, when there's so much horror all around? And just think of the debilitating role that change has taken in life. It often seems as though change is the only constant (the only thing that's NOT changing!) that we now have! So, how can I point to the constancy of God's Spirit-Breath in the light of that? Think, also, of the rampant consumerism, and materialism that's an inseparable part of life in the 21st Century, where the focus is on appearance, not reality. I mean, how dare I talk about the transcendent meaning of God in the face of that? My word, but we now live in a world where a person can go to church Sunday morning, read an essay in philosophy by the great German thinker, Goethe, in the afternoon, listen to the raptures of Bach's music on Sunday evening, and then get up on Monday morning and go to work in a death camp, a death camp like the notorious Auschwitz death camp. You see, that's exactly what Rudolph Hoss, the German commandant of Auschwitz, used to do in 1943 and 1944!

And, so, to THE great dilemma of life for us in this post-modern world of ours: how on earth can creativity and beauty exist side by side with pure, unadulterated abomination? How indeed! I don't know, but it does and that's precisely why I also know that we need God's spirit now more than ever! The disciples sure needed 'She Who Is' fifty days after Jesus' brutal death; we need her just as much today! You see, 'She Who Is' lifts us up when we've been knocked down. 'She Who Is' tells us that we're prized beyond measure when we feel worthless. 'She Who Is' inspires us to do more, and become more, when circumstances tell us that there's nothing that we can possibly do. 'She Who Is' gives us a way back into relationship when we're duped into feeling that we're all alone, and that life's useless, hopeless!

So ... [breathing in] ... do you feel her? Do you feel her deep-down inside? Do you feel her claiming you, adopting you into God's story all over again? Come, let's prepare to experience God's spirit all over again as we celebrate communion!

O blessed are you, gracious God, Creator of life and Source of love! At your Word creation began; you breathed life into us and set us among all your creatures in a covenant of love and service. We give you thanks for your gifts of Pentecost: for prophetic words; for new visions; for the wind that blows down the walls which separate us from you, and one another. And, so, we join with all creation, O Holy, holy, holy God:

Sanctus and Benedictus

O holy, holy, holy God, O God of time and space.

All earth and sea and sky above bear witness to your grace.

Hosanna in the highest heav'n, Creation sings your praise.

And blessed is the One who comes and bears your name always!

Mighty and tender God, in Jesus of Nazareth we recognize your grace revealed in words that confront and comfort us, in teachings that challenge and change us, in compassion that heals and frees us. And, so, we gather at this table to remember and be filled with longing for your

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realm. We remember that when Jesus last ate with his friends, he took a loaf of bread, and after blessing it, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, "Take, eat. This is my body, given for you." Then he took a cup and passed it to his friends, saying, "Drink. This cup that is poured out for you is the promise of God."

At this time, God, we also remember all with whom you would have us share your feast. So, we pray for all who are in sorrow or in pain, we pray for all who are ill or alone, we pray for all who live with fear, oppression, or hunger. And, in the silence of the next moments, O God, hear, we pray, the concerns that we carry with us this day: *moment of silence*.

Loving God, we rejoice in the gift of your grace. Grant that, in praise and thanksgiving, we may so offer ourselves to you that our very lives may proclaim the mystery of faith:

Memorial Acclamation

Sing Christ has died and Christ is risen,

Christ will come again!

Sing Christ has died and Christ is risen,

Christ will come again!

Send, O God, your Holy Spirit upon us and upon these gifts, that all who share in this loaf and cup may become the body of Christ in this world. Come, God's feast is ready!

➤ The Bread of Life – take, eat, hunger no more!

➤ The Cup of Grace – take, drink, thirst no more!

We thank you for meeting with us in these elements, O God – amen!

The Great Amen

Amen, amen, O Holy One! Hosanna and Amen!

Amen, amen, O Holy One! Hosanna and Amen!

⇒ Hymn suggestion: MV 154 'Deep in Our Hearts'

Now that we've been accepted, forgiven, fed, and revitalized, send us back out, O God, into your good creation with all the gifts of your amazing, enlivening, scintillating Spirit! Amen.