

*Common Worship in Separate Places
For the people of Elmwood Avenue Presbyterian Church
London, Ontario
and their friends*

*The Day of Pentecost
23 May 2021*

To cross the threshold into worship, light a candle and keep a moment of silence.

Opening Words

L: Come, Holy Spirit, and fill the hearts of your faithful people.

P: Kindle within us the fire of your love.

L: Let us worship God.

A Litany for Pentecost

L: Holy Spirit, Holy Creator,
in the beginning you moved over the face of the waters.
From your breath all creation drew life.
Without you, all life returns to dust.

P: Come, Holy Spirit.

L: Holy Spirit, Holy Counsellor,
by your inspiration, the prophets spoke and acted in faith.
You clothed them in power to be bearers of your Word.

P: Come, Holy Spirit.

L: Holy Spirit, Holy Power,
you came as tongues of fire upon the disciples of Jesus;
you gave them a strong voice before the rulers of this world.

P: Come, Holy Spirit.

L: Holy Spirit, Holy Sanctifier,
you created us to be children of God;
you make us the living Temple of your presence;
you intercede for us with sighs too deep for words.

P: Come, Holy Spirit.

L: Holy Spirit, Giver of Life,
you guide and make holy the Church you call into being;
you bestow your gifts upon us –
the spirit of wisdom and understanding,
the spirit of counsel and fortitude,

the spirit of knowledge and piety,
and the fear of the Lord,
that the whole creation may one day sing your glory.

P: Come, Holy Spirit.

L: Come, Holy Spirit, enter our lives this day.
Throw open the locked doors of our souls.
Cleanse the chambers of our hearts to be your dwelling place.
Light the fire of your truth in our minds,
and give us perfect freedom to serve you
with the Father and the Son, one God forever.

P: Amen

Prayer for Illumination Holy One, let your Spirit overshadow us now. Open our eyes to visions of your truth as we hear and receive your Word; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen*

The Psalm for the Day

Psalm 104: 24-35 (*Praise to God for all Creation*)

O Lord, how manifold are your works!
In wisdom you have made them all;
the earth is full of your creatures.
There is the sea, spread far and wide,
and there move creatures beyond number, both small and great.
There go the ships, and there is that Leviathan
which you have made to play in the deep.
All of these look to you
to give them their food in due season.
When you give it them, they gather it;
you open your hand and they are filled with good.
When you hide your face they are troubled;
when you take away their breath,
they die and return again to the dust.
When you send forth your spirit, they are created,
and you renew the face of the earth.
May the glory of the Lord endure for ever;
may the Lord rejoice in his works;
He looks on the earth and it trembles;
he touches the mountains and they smoke.

I will sing to the Lord as long as I live;
 I will make music to my God while I have my being.
 So shall my song please him
 while I rejoice in the Lord.
 Bless the Lord, O my soul. Alleluia.

(Said together) **Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, as it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be, world without end. Amen**

A Reading for the Day

St John 15: 26-27 and 16: 4b-7, 12-15 *(Jesus promises the sending of the Spirit)*

Jesus said: '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. You also are to testify because you have been with me from the beginning.

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

'Nevertheless, 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.

'I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. When 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.

'He will glorify me, because he will take what is mine and declare it to you. All that the Father has is mine. For this reason, I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you.'

L: This is the Gospel of the Risen Christ

P: Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

Some thoughts on the Reading

St John 16:12 *"I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now."*

Sometimes the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, is too much to bear all at once. Who could absorb the whole Bible in one sitting, or read all of Shakespeare's plays in a day? *Game of Thrones* addicts may 'binge watch' an entire season, but their heads feel foggy when they've finished.

Woody Allen took a 'speed reading' course. He read *War and Peace* at a brisk tempo. But all he could say was, "It involves Russia."

In his last conversation with his disciples, on the night before his death on a cross, Jesus said that the living truth he embodies is too much to bear, too immense to absorb all at once.

"I still have things to impart," he said, "but you can't *bear* them now." St John uses the same word when Jesus *bears* his cross to the place called Golgotha.

We need time to make sense of Jesus Christ and his cross. We mustn't be rushed. We learned printing before we learned handwriting, didn't we? Children must master addition and subtraction before they tackle multiplication and long division. Step by step, they do. But the learning never ends. There's always more to know.

Jesus Christ takes a lifetime to know. We'll never be finished plumbing his truth, sounding the depths of his meaning, and re-moulding our lives in his light.

But how? Has Jesus abandoned us to our own devices, leaving us to make of him whatever we wish? The disciples feared this. Jesus' imminent departure troubled them. Their life with him felt only half-finished. Who would bring their lives to completion? Why must it end this way, and so abruptly? How would they live without him?

"Do not let your hearts be troubled," he told them. But they *were* troubled. "Sorrow filled their hearts," says John.

But Jesus promised never to leave them orphaned. "I will send you the Spirit of truth...to guide you into all the truth."

All the truth about what? All the truth about Jesus Christ and his meaning for the world. "The Spirit will...take what is mine and *declare* it to you," he said.

This is the reality we must re-absorb at Pentecost. Pentecost is the third of the three great Festivals that the Church must celebrate: first Christmas, then Easter, then the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost.

What is this Holy Spirit? It's the strength and love of God, present here and now. The Spirit shapes our lives in the truth of Jesus Christ the way a sculptor shapes clay. For the Church is an 'organism' before its an organisation. It's the living body of Christ, animated by his Spirit, and we are members of it.

So, here's a question. In how many ways, and in how many 'languages', can the truth of Jesus Christ be shaped and shown, and his love lived out? In science and history and art? In politics and commerce? In teaching and conversation? In games and the fellowship of the table? In prayer, worship, and devotion? In domestic life and *inner* life?

Down the centuries, led by the Spirit, the Church found ways to embody Jesus Christ in *all* these realms – though never infallibly – in more ways than anyone can know or number. And more. When the Church gets stubborn and stupid, the Spirit does this *outside* the Church too.

The Spirit not only ‘helps us in our weakness’, then. The Spirit softens our hard hearts too. The Spirit prods our creativity, provoking us to show the truth, goodness, and beauty of Jesus Christ in a million different ways, places, and times.

What’s more, the Spirit helps us to discern the true way from the false, and to recognise the presence of Jesus Christ in different cultures and different ways of life.

In the 1970s, the CBC broadcast a little TV show called “What on Earth?” The host would display an obsolescent artefact from the museum. (Many of us look at the Church as an obsolescent artefact, don’t we? Our children certainly do.) The panel would try to guess what it was. If they didn’t know its proper name, they’d still get points if they could say what it was *for*, and how it was once used ‘in real life’.

To know what our lives are *for*, to be adept at *living* the truth of Jesus Christ ‘in real life’ – this is the Spirit’s work. This is what the Church is for.

“You are to testify to me,” says Jesus, “because you have been with me.” For those we’ve ‘been with’ rub off on us, don’t they?

But our testimony must be more than pious talk or the parroting of a creed. It wants ‘spelling out’. To *say* “Jesus is Lord” may mean everything or nothing. After ‘tell me’ comes ‘show me’. Our testimony must finally be ‘written in the body’, the body of the Christ, the Church, and in the lives of those who are members of it.

We feel the Holy Spirit at work within us when we’re fed up with what we’ve become, and we hunger for a new way of life.

We feel the Holy Spirit at work within us when we’re called to advocate a new but risky course of action in the world – the way Wilberforce campaigned against slavery, or the way Dietrich Bonhoeffer resisted the Nazis.

We feel the Holy Spirit at work when creativity stirs within us, as when a composer writes new music, and a singer performs it.

We feel the Holy Spirit at work when we’re moved to speak honest words of difficult truth, when we make our corner of the world into a garden, write a letter of condolence, host a meal, repair something broken, plead for someone’s forgiveness, care for someone who’s ill, or do something pleasurable that’s beautiful and true.

Our Lord never asked us to bear his truth ‘all at once’. He is the Lord of all Creation. His Spirit will never leave us. We have all the time in the world.

Prayers of Intercession

Holy One, you breathed life into our human form so that we could return your breath in prayer to you. Sometimes our prayer is a long sigh and clumsy words. But you know what is in our hearts. Inspire us now.

L: Lord in your mercy

P: Hear our prayer

Lord of the Church, the Apostles gathered in one place on the Day of Pentecost, and your Spirit came upon them. Hasten the day when we, too, will gather in one place

to hear your Word and sing your praise in the power of your Holy Spirit. Let us never forget each other, or we have known of your love through friendship with each other. Fan the flame of hope within us.

L: Lord in your mercy

P: Hear our prayer

We pray for people of other faiths, for Jews, Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, and for people with no faith at all. Help us to see, shining through them, the true light that lightens everyone who comes into the world, so that by knowing and loving them, and by living alongside each other in friendship, you may draw us closer to you.

L: Lord in your mercy

P: Hear our prayer

Holy Spirit, source of life, fill us with respect for all living things, and inspire us with delight in the beauty of your creation. Teach us to conserve and not to squander nature's bounty, and to plan for the welfare of our children's children.

L: Lord in your mercy

P: Hear our prayer

God of peace, send your healing where bodies and minds are ill or hurting. Break the force of the sword, the bullet, and the bomb. Break the arrogance of power run amok, the vicious lies of racism and the violence of human greed. Let the mighty, rushing wind of peace batter down the locked doors of hatred.

L: Lord in your mercy

P: Hear our prayer

Holy One, when words fail us, your Spirit intercedes for us with sighs too deep for words. We remember before you those who have died, whose absence causes tears that never seem to end. Strengthen us to trust that the veil dividing us from them is only as thin as gossamer...*(keep a time of silence in God's presence)*....

L: Lord in your mercy

P: Hear our prayer

O love that fires the sun, keep us burning. Rekindle in everything we touch, and in everyone we meet, a vision of your new creation, breaking through, groaning and travailing, but already upon us.

As our Saviour Christ has taught us, so we pray:

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name; thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory, for ever. Amen

Benediction

(Said together) **The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all, now and forever. Amen**