

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

*The Feast of Pentecost
10:30 a.m.
31 May 2020*

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

Opening Words

L: The God of the whirlwind and fire sweeps into our presence in this hour.

P: Glory be to God, whose Spirit unites all people in the language of love.

L: Let us worship God.

Prayers of Adoration and Confession

Living God, and true, send your Spirit with the power of a mighty wind. Open our minds by the flame of your wisdom. Loosen our tongues to sing your praise, for only in your Spirit can we live your words of peace and acclaim Jesus Christ as Lord. All praise be to you, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, one God forever.

Spirit of Mercy, you fill us with living faith, but we fear a faith that lives. Confront us with truths we would rather avoid. Search our hearts and shed your light on its darkest parts. Open our eyes to the way of Christ, and our ears to your Spirit speaking to us. Wash and heal our wounded hearts. Make us sure of Christ's forgiving love, ignite our desire to do his will, and bring us to the joy of our salvation.

L: Lord, have mercy upon us;

P: Christ, have mercy upon us;

L: Lord, have mercy upon us.

Come, Holy Spirit, enter our hearts in blessed mercy. Throw open the locked doors of our minds; cleanse the chambers of our hearts for your dwelling. Light there the fires of your own holy brightness in new understandings of truth. Then give us perfect freedom to serve you, with the Father and the Son, one God forever. *Amen*

An Assurance of Pardon

L: "Neither death, nor life, nor anything in all creation, can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord." May God grant us pardon, true repentance, and bring us to eternal life.

P: May the peace of Christ be with us all.

Prayer for Illumination

O God, let your Spirit overshadow us now. Bring us to a vision 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 for all Creation*)

O Lord, how manifold are your works!
 In wisdom you have made them all;
 the earth is full of your creatures.
 Yonder is the sea, great and wide,
 creeping things innumerable are there,
 living things both small and great.
 There go the ships,
 and Leviathan that you formed to sport in it.
 These all look to you
 to give them their food in due season;
 when you give to them, they gather it up;
 when you open your hand, they are filled with good things.
 When you hide your face, they are dismayed;
 when you take away their breath, they die
 and return to their dust.
 When you send forth your spirit, they are created;
 and you renew the face of the ground.
 May the glory of the Lord endure for ever;
 may the Lord rejoice in his works—
 who looks on the earth and it trembles,
 who touches the mountains and they smoke.
 I will sing to the Lord as long as I live;
 I will sing praise to my God while I have being.
 May my meditation be pleasing to him,
 for I rejoice in the Lord.
 Bless the Lord, O my soul.
 Praise the Lord!

(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***

The Reading for the Day

Acts 2: 1-21 (*The Holy Spirit descends on the Day of Pentecost.*)

When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all 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 sitting.

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 them speaking in the native language of each.

Amazed and astonished, they asked, 'Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language? Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabs—in our own languages 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.'

But Peter, standing with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed them: 'People 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, for it is only nine o'clock in the morning. No, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel:

"In the last days it will be, God declares,
that 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.

Even upon my slaves, both men and women,
in those days I will pour out my Spirit;
and they shall prophesy.

And I will show portents in the heaven above
and signs on the earth below,
blood, and fire, and smoky mist.

The sun shall be turned to darkness
and the moon to blood,

before the coming of the Lord's great and glorious day.

Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.'"

L: This is the Word of the Lord.

P: Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

Some thoughts on the Reading.

Acts 2: 2-3 *"There came sound of rushing wind...tongues, as of fire, appeared among them."*

Wind and fire signify the life that courses through creation like electricity through a wire. To be cold and breathless is to be as dead as a stone, the 'spark of life' completely absent. Breath and heat are signs of life in every human body. So with the Church, the body of Christ.

God's love for the heat and breath of life is built into nature's bias for life too. Just days after a forest fire, when the ground is still warm from it, new seeds put down tiny roots. Life re-asserts itself. How quickly the green appears! Canada's boreal forest *needs* fire. The heat of its flame releases fresh seeds from tightly closed spruce and pine cones.

"See? Nature abhors a vacuum," says the ecologist. "See? The Creator loves life," says the Church. Each one points to the same patch of ground. They're saying something so similar as to be almost identical. But they're using different languages. If only they could *hear* each other.

On that long-ago Pentecost morning, some said the disciples were drunk. "No," said Peter. "It's 9 a.m., the bars aren't open yet." But they weren't entirely wrong. Peter's drink was not fermented, no, but in a strange way *he* was.

Fermentation is yeast 'doing its thing'. Yeast turns grain into bread and grapes into wine. At Holy Communion, the Holy Spirit does his thing, too, making that bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ.

The Spirit did his thing on Peter and the disciples that day by transforming them as well. How? God doesn't make them into zombies, robots, religious puppets devoid of free will and reason. It's just the opposite. They become more themselves, more alive, more knowing, awake, and truly free.

Living the life God *calls* us to live is to live the life God *made* us to live. Who wouldn't want this, whatever the cost? For it's the work of God's Holy Spirit, not to quash our desires and dull our senses, but, like living yeast fermenting fine wine, to animate the people we already *are*, only more.

The 'holiness' of life can be communicated. That, too, is the message of Pentecost. Its medium is the Church. Its voice speaks through all languages, cultures and kinds of human being who can put down roots and grow in God's creation.

For God saves us, God makes us ‘whole’, not by snatching us one by one from the world, like shipwrecked sailors plucked from the sea, but by forming us into a living vessel of the Holy Spirit, the Church.

The Church is made from that wild array of people who admit, however reluctantly, that they’re going to have to belong to Jesus Christ after all, so they’re going to have to put up with each other too. They’re not nicer, holier, purer, funnier, smarter, richer, better looking, better sounding, or better living than anyone else.

But God’s Spirit has tapped us on the shoulder, and we fell for it. We turned and said, “Yes?” And now it’s too late. He has us.

Or we were successfully minding our own successful business, enthralled by our own thriving. But then God’s Spirit ruined it all, yanked us from our self-obsession, and set us on a truer path.

Or sadness and loneliness filled us with a pain “too deep for words.” No one could hear us cry in the world’s loud din. No one could understand us. No one wanted to. *No one*. But then God’s Spirit whispered, “I hear you. I understand you.”

We haven’t lost our reason, we’ve found it. We’re not enslaved by dogma, we’re freed by love. We’re not the walking dead, we’ve come to life.

The life of God was always around us, always within us. But now we’ve heard the good tidings of great joy which shall be to all people, uttered in each one’s language. It makes us not less but more of who we are.

This is why the Church came to be.

Prayers of Intercession

Holy One, you breathed your life into our human form so that we could return your breath in prayer to you. Sometimes our prayer is poor, a long sigh and clumsy words. But you understand us anyway. 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 your sanctuary to hear your Word and sing your praise in the power of your Holy Spirit. Let us never forget each other, or all we have learned of your love through friendship with each other. Make our hearts one, though we are scattered, and 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 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 ever closer to you.

L: Lord in your mercy

P: Hear our prayer.

Holy Spirit, source of life, defend us from our own folly. Fill us with respect for all living things, and inspire delight in the beauty of your creation. Teach us to conserve and not to squander nature's bounty, to plan for the welfare of our children's children. Teach us to be good tenants of the place you lend us for a short time as our own.

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 and the vicious lies of racism. Let the mighty, rushing wind of peace batter down the locked doors of hatred, buttressed by prejudice, barred and bottled by fear. Draw the nations into a closer unity, in freedom, founded on your justice and love.

L: Lord in your mercy

P: Hear our prayer.

We remember before you those who have died, whose absence causes tears that never seem to end. Strengthen us to trust that it is only a veil as thin as gossamer dividing us from them now. 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...*(keep a time of silence in God's presence)*....

L: Lord in your mercy

P: Hear our prayer.

Holy Spirit, in all life you live, the true life of all. Breathe into our souls a love for all things true and beautiful and good; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives with you and the Father, one God, world without end.

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**