

“We Are the Story”

Pastor Hubert, Pinegrove, May 24, 2015 - Pentecost



Let's take a moment and look at this painting, called "The First Pentecost. I haven't been able to find out who painted it, but whoever it was, I like it a lot, as it clearly conveys the energy, the movement and the excitement of that special day; it shows the joy *and* the confusion, and most importantly, it shows this surge of divine energy pushing Christ's followers out into the world. There is this unstoppable movement forward and outward. *Something* happened there that made them no longer scared and insecure, but joyful and confident. What an experience that must have been!

Up until that time, Jesus had been making resurrection appearances. His friends understood that somehow Jesus was still with them; however on Pentecost they all received a fundamental new understanding: Jesus wasn't only still among them - the Holy Spirit that was inside Jesus was now also inside them. God was not only among them, God was also *inside* them.

In the gospel of John, when Jesus realizes it won't be long before he'll be arrested, he says to the disciples: I will not abandon you, but I will send you the Holy Spirit, the Advocate and the Comforter to be inside of you. At one point Jesus breathes on the disciples and says, have some breath, have some spirit.

It's not the first time in the Bible that people receive "divine breath". In fact, it happens right from the start in Genesis, when God creates the first human being out of mud and clay, and literally breathes life into him. And even before that, when everything was still a formless void, what was moving over that chaos? God's Spirit, or literally: God's breath, creating order out of chaos. It's the exact same word. We need breath in order to exist; we need the spirit of God in order to live well.

At Pentecost, that same divine breath, that Holy Spirit, is given to everyone. The story tells us that divine breath filled each person, and something like tongues of flame appeared. The rubberneckers thought that these hick Galileans were filled with alcohol. We know they were filled with God.

Then Peter gets up, and reminds everyone of the words of the prophet Joel a long time ago in which God promises to pour out the Holy Spirit upon everyone, to breathe into *everyone*. Not just religious people, or respectable people, or young people or old people, or straight people, or white people or smart people - no, says God: *everyone*. No matter who we are, or how unworthy we maybe think we are, every single one of us here today has received this special gift: the divine breath, or the Holy Spirit, as we call it.

And once we have received it, we have to share it. Or as the Bible calls it: we have to prophesy. So what is prophecy-deal all about?

I remember my first preaching class at the Centre for Christian Studies. There were about ten people in the class, and to get us in the right frame of mind we first had to do a visual prayer exercise. We were asked to close our eyes, take three slow breaths to calm and centre ourselves, and then to imagine putting on a robe or a stole, and imagine to slowly take our place in the pulpit at our home church. Once we visualized ourselves really there, we were asked to think of what we might like to say about Christ to the congregation, just a few words. Maybe a Bible verse, or a hymn, or just an idea or even a question - anything.

Then when we opened our eyes, we were asked to share how that felt. Intimidating, energizing, humbling...? As we went around the circle, there was one woman who began to sob. She said, "When I imagined myself in the pulpit, I could think of nothing to say or share; my mind was a blank." She felt like she had failed Christ, and tears started to roll down her cheeks.

I will never forget her. She had great passion for Christ - and yet somehow her voice had been silenced. Silenced! How was that possible when God's Spirit has given us the gift of prophecy...?! This fire to share our story?

I think it happens often in our society to all of us. We are forgetting how to tell our stories, the stories that make us who we are. Simple stories we share over supper, while doing the dishes or walking the dog or during a road trip. Simple stories that don't necessarily have a moral point to them, often they don't even have a beginning or an end. Yet they're stories that often gently and instinctively explore shared wisdom. Everyone, without exception, has stories like these to tell, because through these stories we tell ourselves and each other what we are about.

I think in our rushed high-speed culture, we are rapidly forgetting how to tell these stories. Our lives are so full now, that there often is no family dinner hour anymore. Everyone has their own activities planned so everyone has to eat at a different time, or in the car on the way to somewhere. We're always in a rush. Parents come home from work at different times. Children have hockey practice, or dance lessons or

music lessons. Everyone eats and dashes off. No more time for storytelling, no more time to make loving connections, and certainly no more time for prayer. Sometimes when I ask people to tell me their story, all they can tell me are a bunch of facts, it's like they give me their resume. Those people have lost their identity because we are so much more than facts.

As we grow up it's crucial for us to hear who we are: the stories of how we were born, how we grew up, what we liked and disliked, how our parents met, stories of our aunts and uncles, grandmas and grandpas, and how *they* met. Stories of growing, of pain, of courage, of love and of loss, stories of hope and healing; stories about God...

If we *think* we have no stories to tell, it is because we haven't been listening carefully enough and we have forgotten about the Spirit within us. Most of us touched by the Spirit live lives that are far richer and far more meaningful than we think we do. Deep within us, we carry every story we have ever heard and every story we have ever lived, waiting for us to grow and mature so we're able to tell them when they need to be told.

Once it sinks in that the Holy Spirit is in each of us, just waiting to help us give meaning to our own stories, then just like Peter, the stories will start to flow. So start now, at the kitchen table. Forget self-help books and TV and the internet - those are all *other* peoples' stories, people you are not connected with. Instead, listen to the stories of the people around all you, and you will find that in return they will listen to *your* stories. Plan a family night with no TV, no video games, computer games, no smart phones. "Unplug" once a week, and connect to the people who matter to you, your family, friends, neighbours - and let the stories grow and let the Spirit flow.

Each of us here has the gift of prophecy. Each of us here has the ability to dream dreams and see visions, as we sang this morning. Each of us here has the ability to share our stories with others. Not because we're so smart or talented, but simply because we are the children of God. We have the gift of the Spirit, we got something to say!

Remember the woman I mentioned earlier, who realized she had nothing to say about Christ? It took her a long time, but now she is able to share *her* story, not just from the pulpit, but also in small groups and one-on-one conversations. She found the courage to trust the Spirit flow through her, and will never be caught without a voice again.

May the same be true for us here, this Pentecost Day. Amen.