

# North Kildonan United Church

23<sup>rd</sup> May 2021 ~Rev. Don Johnson

## “The Day of Pentecost”

*Acts 2: 1-21*

*John 15: 26-27; 16: 4b-15*

*Grant, O God, that in the written word and through the spoken word, we may behold the living Word, our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. Amen.*

Today we celebrate with Christians around the world the coming of the Holy Spirit to the Church at Pentecost. The description is vivid and vibrant, as the wind from heaven descended with full force around the waiting apostles, and tongues of fire alighted upon each of them, filling them with the power and the promise of the Holy Spirit.

The Spirit blessed the apostles with the ability to speak in other languages, which so amazed the assembled bystanders. *"How can these Galileans speak in languages they do not know?"* What in the world is going on they must have wondered.

Then Peter, who in the book of Acts would become the chief spokesperson for this new movement we know as the church, put the whole event into context, declaring this to be fulfillment of the promise of God:

*'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, 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.'"*

For 2,000 years the Spirit of God has been guiding and encouraging the people of God to spread the gospel throughout the world, in every tongue, to every tribe and nation, in all conditions and times, in safety and in danger, in oppression and in freedom.

Throughout the history of the Church, a history which has known many high and many low points, many successes and some tremendous failures, nevertheless, the Church has always had faithful women and men, individuals filled with the Holy Spirit, who have sought and laboured for the sharing of the good news of Jesus Christ to all the world. These saints and visionaries, these teachers and workers and clergy and faithful Christian folk, have given us the church to which we belong, an inheritance which we in time will pass on to the succeeding generations.

So we celebrate this day, this Day of Pentecost, grateful and confident in the guiding of the Holy Spirit in our congregation and in our lives.

Each year, around this time, Luther Seminary in St Paul, Minnesota holds a week-long *Festival of Homiletics*, an event that focusses on preaching, worship, new church development and strengthening congregational life.

This year the event began on May 17<sup>th</sup> and is, as is needed, being presented online. The title of the 2021 festival is *Preaching for the Future Church*, with a focus on how we will worship and preach once the pandemic is over.

I want to share with you some insights from the first two days of this event.

Bishop Michael Curry was the preacher at the opening service and then later in the day he was interviewed. He is the Primate of the Episcopal Church of the United States, which we know as the Anglican Church.

He is a tremendously gifted and wise preacher, as was demonstrated three years ago when he preached at the wedding of Prince Harry and Meghan in St George's Chapel, Windsor Castle.

The centrality of Christ is a dominant theme for Bishop Michael. As he said, when Jesus is not the way, the Christian loses the way.

He talked about a sabbatical project he was engaged in a number of years ago, in which he examined the various Christian positions on slavery in the United States. In reading over the documents, especially sermons and writings in favour of slavery and against slavery, he made an important discovery. The anti-slavery clergy and laity often quoted Jesus when presenting their arguments. The pro-slavery leaders quoted other parts of scripture that speak of slaves obeying their masters, for instance but never quoted Jesus, because of course Jesus never spoke in favour of slavery.

He sees a similar theme in today's issues around racism. As he put it, and repeated it often: *"If bigotry is your game, Jesus is not the name."*

He told the story of a man who would read the Bible to his grandmother. She had been a slave and never learned to read. But she knew her Bible and told her grandson what she wanted to hear. Read the gospels, read the psalms, but don't read St Paul, because that's what the masters used to read as they kept her and others in slavery. The only part of Paul she would allow was I Corinthians 13: *"Now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest is love."*

He urged the listeners to put Christ back into Christianity, to love one another as Jesus loves us.

He talked about the vulnerability he has felt through this pandemic and the sudden realization of relief he felt when he received the vaccine. A sentiment many of us agree with, I'm sure.

And in reference to this pandemic, he also reminded us that the Lord God has walked with the people before, and will do it again, will do it with us. As he said, *"What God did for them, he will do for you."* Words we need to trust.

Bishop Curry is truly a wonderful preacher and leader and I look forward to the possibility of us studying his work when conditions permit.

Another preacher we heard from was the Rev Sam Wells, vicar of St Martin in the Fields Church, London, England. His text was from the Song of Songs, or Song of Solomon as we know it. "*The winter is over*" was his theme.

He talked about the winters people go through, the winter we have gone through with pandemic.

He told the story of a friend of his, whose wife was having a routine scan before she gave birth. The fetus was fine but something else showed up. Six weeks after delivering her baby boy, she died.

The winter had begun for his friend and the infant boy.

Five years later, Sam attended this man's second marriage. As the marriage questions were asked, the priest said to the bride: "*Do you welcome this boy as your son?*" She did. The five-year-old, in a fine suit and sitting in the front row was asked: "*Do you welcome this woman as your mother?*" He certainly did. For that family, the winter was truly over.

As he reminded us, we are still struggling with the pandemic, but as he said: "*Spring may not be here, but the winter is over.*"

The Song of Songs, or Song of Solomon, is love poetry, full of language that speaks, that sings, of intimacy and passion between two individuals. Sam encouraged us to also see the book as a love song from God to us. As he says, God is inviting us, all of us, to trust God with our innermost secrets, to be safe in God's embrace, nurtured by faith and hope and love.

Spring may not be here, but the winter is over. May God's promise of spring, in the midst of all of our winters, touch our hearts with joy.

Amen.