

Canada!
Stouffville United Church
Sunday, June 4, 2017
Pentecost Sunday/Canada 150

Acts 2

Today is the Day of Pentecost. Pentecost is Greek for fiftieth as in the fiftieth day after Easter. And the Day of Pentecost is all about the arrival of the Holy Spirit into that room where the disciples gathered one day.

And as we read Acts 2:1-21, we are told that the wind came in from nowhere. And it was violent. And then tongues of fire appeared upon the heads of the disciples, and then the disciples began to speak in tongues, and then they spilled out from that room which could not contain them any longer, and they spilled out of that room, and they spilled out of that house and into the plaza or the street where everyone who was there stood in amazement. And the people heard what the men were saying, in each their own languages.

What a day that was.

And so a question I have for you, and I've borrowed it from Barbara Brown Taylor, is – Do we still believe in a God who acts like that?

Is the Holy Spirit an agency, an energy, a spirit that can invoke sudden and great change in your life, or in the life of the church, as it did on that day in Jerusalem, when the Holy Spirit, that all out, unpredictable, uncontainable energy came down from somewhere in the heavens, and disrupted the sanctity of that room where the 12 gathered?

Red is the church liturgical colour for the day of Pentecost. Red is for fire, the fire of the Holy Spirit, the fire that possessed these men to rise up and become something far greater than they knew possible. This fire gave them the impetus to become the presence, the witness, the voice of the one they called Friend, Redeemer, Saviour. This Fire they say birthed the church.

“Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them.” (Acts 2:3) William Willimon notes that Pentecost is a revelation to a whole multitude. “The tongues of fire rest upon ‘each (Acts 2:3) of those present. Every single person hears the disciples speaking in his or her native tongue. Just about every corner of the Greco-Roman empire is listed in the roll call of place names. What happens at Pentecost gathers a crowd from all over the earth and touches every single one in the crowd.”

Pentecost celebrates diversity. Canada celebrates diversity. And today we celebrate 150 years of that ability to nationally welcome and support and encourage diversity – of ethnicity, of language, of culture. Most recently, Canada was a world leader in opening its borders to the flow of Syrian refugees, which has been part of our story here too at Stouffville United Church with our direct involvement with Stouffville Cares.

And Canada has been a world leader for peace initiatives and for answering the call in not one but two world wars. We are a country that values peace, that is a world leader for climate change. We are known for so many good things.

Yesterday was Doors Open in Stouffville. This church was one of the 14 locations featured in the 2017 Event. Many of you were here volunteering as tour guides and quilters and knitters and organists and I was so proud of this church. We looked amazing! We sounded amazing – a pipe organ is indeed a rarity for so many people and these organ pipes were photographed all day.

During the morning I went over to see the Doors Open Huron-Wendat site, located by Wendat Public School. The Whitchurch-Stouffville Museum was there with artifacts from its collection as well as a self-guided walking tour. Many of you know that the area south of Hoover Park and west of the 10th is the site of a village of the Huron-Wendat dating from the 16th century.

From the walking tour information: “First Nations people have lived on this land we call Canada for over 20,000 years. Between 1200 AD and 1580 there were dozens of First Nations Villages along the north shore of Lake Ontario. The Mantle site was a very large ancestral Wendat community that was occupied between 1500 and 1530. The site was excavated in 2003-2005 and is described as being ‘the largest, most complex, cosmopolitan village of its time.’”

Where I struggle more so now than ever is that yes, we’ve been here for 150 years, but for thousands of years before that, another people lived here and called this land home and had a way of life that had deep roots in the land – the indigenous peoples of Canada.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission published its 94 Calls to Action in December 2015, after 6 years of hearings and testimony from nearly 7,000 residential school survivors. One of those calls (no. 48) is directed to Canadian churches. It challenges us to adopt and comply with the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) as the framework for reconciliation.

The United Church of Canada announced that it would adopt this on March 31, 2016, a deadline specified by the TRC. The UN Declaration enshrines minimum standards for Indigenous Peoples for self-determination, lands, resources, freedom from discrimination, cultural and spiritual identity, participation in decision-making, and free, prior and informed consent.

One way we can begin this work of reconciliation with the Indigenous Peoples of Canada is to develop a practice of the acknowledgement of traditional territory to begin worship. Rev. Cecile Fausak worked for ten years in the United Church’s General Council Office as Liaison Minister for Residential Schools and in an interview in the May Mandate magazine, she says, “It seems like a small thing, but knowing and acknowledging whose Indigenous territory you are occupying is a big thing.” (p. 17)

Pentecost asks us to hold up diversity, and to celebrate differences. That in our diversity, we can be community. When the disciples spilled out of the room, and out of the house and into

the street amidst all the nations and cultures assembled there, a moment was celebrated when a shared identity happened and while there were differences, there was understanding.

Yesterday afternoon, I visited another Doors Open site – the Darul Khair Center – the mosque in Stouffville. It is around the corner from this church on Main Street. They remembered me from the Candlelight Walk and Vigil our church organized in February in commemoration of the 6 Muslims shot to death as they prayed in a mosque in Quebec City.

And yesterday there were two terrorist attacks in London, England, involving vans driving into people on London Bridge, knife attacks in a near by neighbourhood. On May 22nd, a suicide bomber killed 22 people, many of them children, and wounded over 100 people in Manchester, England.

I sat in the mosque with others as part of a presentation by their imam on the Faith of Islam. And I kept thinking, this is as it should be. Christians and Muslims together, able to speak their own truth, but respectful of the other's truth. And yet, across the ocean, devastation and cruel death because in that moment there was no mutuality, no shared identity.

When She came down, that Holy Spirit that was on fire, that Holy Spirit that was a disturber, that was a mover, when She came down and strode into that room and ignited the minds and the hearts of those who were near, no one was exempt from that Holy Fire.

And the disciples spilled out of the room, out of the house and into the street and into the midst of all the nations and cultural diversity there, and it was good. It was so good.

Amen.