

Come, O Holy Spirit! Through these words humbly offered, enliven and empower us, to hear God's call and respond. Amen

Today is the day! The wait is over!

It's been several weeks, or perhaps in biblical time it's been several days, in either case, the disciples and many of Jesus' followers, are in a holding pattern, still hiding out in the upper room, trying to figure out what to do next.

They've tried doing nothing, but Jesus keeps showing up encouraging them beyond that.

They've tried going back to the same old, same old of their fishing boats, but Jesus makes it abundantly clear that there is no going back.

So they sit and pray and talk, wondering about what is next. And they wait, as Jesus has asked them to, for the coming of a spiritual baptism. A baptism by fire, you might say!

And today is the day! The Day of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit sweeps through the room with the rush of a wind and flames of fire. The scene is award winning in its pyrotechnics and sound effects displays. Even Paramount pictures couldn't out do such a showing!

And this demonstration of God's power through the Holy Spirit has come to be known as the birth of the Christian Church and for generations the church has celebrated it as such. Children get balloons, we feast on a birthday cake during our coffee times, and we rejoice! Hallelujah!

But as I read and researched this past week, I couldn't help but think about how the story of Pentecost is not at all about creating a Christian church. The Spirit did not blow and burn through that upper room so that the people could meet and sing and praise Christ together. In fact, I suspect that's what they were already doing!

And if that were the goal of the Spirit, there is no need for all the different languages to be spoken.

Well of course, you say, but being able to speak different languages is what helps the church to grow! In fact, a little further into the story, we are told that some 3,000 people were baptized that very same day!

That said, there is still no mention of a church; no recommendation to write a Mission and Vision statement, no encouragement to join a committee or take a leadership role on the Board.

No, the sole purpose of the coming of the Holy Spirit, is to enable the followers of Jesus to continue his ministry of love and compassion. By speaking multiple languages, the barriers are broken down and all the people of the world can hear, understand and join in the mission of Jesus, not to build a church, but to have a world filled with love, justice and care.

The prophet Joel, as Peter quotes in today's story, is very clear about this:

¹⁷'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.

¹⁸Even upon my slaves, both men and women,
in those days I will pour out my Spirit;
and they shall prophesy."

God wants, for this world, for the whole world, to have the Spirit poured out upon it; young and old, slave and free, male, female, trans-gender, black, white, brown, indigenous. We are all the same in God's eyes. We are ALL beloved children of God.

This is why the Holy Spirit comes to those first Jesus followers, to enable and empower them to go out and preach this good news!

But this past week, what's been broadcast from our neighbours to the south, is appalling. To think that in this 21st century, when we know so much about the world, about people, about our similarities and differences; to think that a white woman will call the police because a man of colour asks her to put her dog on a leash and protect the ecosystem of the park;

and that a white man has so much hate and anger in him as to use the authority of his police uniform, a uniform reserved for those who are called to serve and protect, to use the authority of this uniform to kneel on the throat of a black man who is begging for air, and to let him die under that knee, and then continue to kneel on him long after the fight and breath has gone out of him! This is not the world God wants. This is not the world Jesus died creating!

We wonder why black communities rise up in rage, demonstrating in the streets? How long can the oppressed stay oppressed, their voices unheard or at best ignored, before they rise up together in protest?

Interestingly, the most recent reports from city and state officials is that the people being arrested for the looting and fires are not from the black communities at all. They aren't even from Minneapolis/St. Paul. In fact, they are from out of state, some are white supremacists. They are hate mongers working to destabilize what had begun as a peaceful demonstration and make the black community look bad. Oppression, it seems, begets oppression.

This is why Jesus' life and ministry is so important and this is what the Holy Spirit, coming at Pentecost is about. It's about freeing the world from oppression and racism and teaching us to care for and respect one another, recognizing each other as beloved.

Jesus' message and ministry teaches us how to eliminate situations such as these. How to live justly with one another so that oppression gives way to freedom and democracy.

I know what you're thinking. Thanks be to God that we live in Canada where people get along and respect each other's differences. But I have to tell you, along with the stories coming out of the US, I have also read stories this week about Canadians who have been racially profiled by police and others.

There may not be the incessant violence that makes the news as in the US, but it is present all the same. All we have to do in the west, is replace the term "black" with "Indigenous" and you will get a sense of what I mean.

I don't think it's any secret that indigenous people make up the majority of the population in our prisons and in our homeless population.

Out east, the black communities will tell you of their own experiences of being racially profiled and mistreated.

We have seen an increase in hate crimes against our Muslim and Jewish siblings of faith, as mosques and synagogues are torched.

And most recently, the anger and prejudice shown to the Chinese communities, over the Covid-19 pandemic is ridiculous and disgraceful.

No, my friends, we are not immune to the prejudice and privilege that abounds in this world.

So maybe, just maybe this is our wake up call. That would be just like Jesus, wouldn't it, to turn the story on its head, to take something meant for evil and use it for good. From the fires of destruction to flames of glory. From oppression to freedom.

I mean, maybe what we're experiencing is a modern day Pentecost. Maybe those fires that are burning in Minneapolis/St Paul are indeed, the flames of the Spirit, coming not to gently alight on our shoulders, but to shock us into action; to explode in us an attitude of "enough is enough"!

We are followers of Jesus, after all, and as such, we cannot, we must not sit by and watch this happening all around us. We must dare, instead, to speak up, to stand up, to step in and proclaim "not on our watch"!

Perhaps you've seen it, a photo taken on the streets of Minneapolis this week. It is a line of white folk, mostly women, standing arm in arm, shoulder to shoulder, a human barricade between the police and the people of the black community who are protesting.

They stand in silence, they stand in peace, they stand in solidarity, they stand as Christ, calling for an end to hatred, injustice and cruelty. The power of the Holy Spirit is upon them!

As for the rest of us, well, like the disciples, we've mostly been maintaining a holding pattern, mulling over what to do, whether or not to get involved or mind our own business. We've tried doing nothing, but Jesus words keep coming back to us encouraging us to do something, calling us to action.

And now, the day of Pentecost is here! The Spirit of God is upon us! May it not just alight gently on our shoulders, but rather, may it create an inferno of compassion within each one of us, so that we too might follow boldly in the way of Jesus, seeking an end to hatred, injustice and cruelty, in our homes, in our communities and in our world.

Today is the day! The wait is over! For the love of God, may it be so!

Amen