



Sermons

from Northwood United Church

Pentecost 2013

“Dandelions in the cracks of the tower of Babel”

Acts 2:1-21

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May the words of my mouth, the meditations of our hearts, and the actions of our lives be acceptable in your sight O God, our strength and our redeemer. Amen

It is nice to be back and word has it my mother-in-law Mary ably offered leadership in my absence, and I appreciate the opportunity to connect with my family at critical moments in life. As most of you probably know my mother was diagnosed with cancer a while back and had surgery which revealed more bad news. She is doing well, but I am grateful that you cut me loose there for a bit, and I am grateful for Mary’s leadership.

There was some jockeying for scriptures in preparation for my time away as last week was, according to the seasons of our Christian calendar, Pentecost Sunday. But given that is my all time favorite Sunday of the year, I was for making alterations in the calendar. As Christians who believe that life is both momentary and eternal, we are allowed to mess with time. But both Mary and I love Pentecost with its wild celebration of spirit and accompanying themes of language and diversity. Stories like the tower of Babel and this amazing wind and fire story in which the disciples spoke in the languages of the world so that in all that chaos, the gospel was heard by all, well there is just so much to work with. So I was kidding Mary that last week she could go ahead and Babel but this week I would speak in tongues. In typical United Church fashion, we decided we could have it all, that Pentecost could be at least a two week celebration.

Pentecost- the celebration of the spirit, whose activity by its very nature is hard to put into words. Wind and flame was Luke’s way of putting it. Still small voice has also been used. Comforter. In Hebrew the word is Ruach which literally means breath. God’s Ruach swept over the waters of creation from the very beginning, cosmic breath breathing life into the universe. God blew Ruach into the first dust of the earth to give life to the first humans.

Do you think that God's Ruach, God’s breath-Spirit is here? Do you really think so. God's Spirit is a wonderful thing, you know- always and everywhere. And when I say everywhere, I mean everywhere! It is in our songs. It is in every breath we take. It is in every thought we have, every feeling we feel. And it does things- God's Spirit. It carries God's love and healing and joins us together into families and communities. It is active in the space between us bringing relationships to life, healing, giving courage to exchange truth, creating safe space for the big questions to be posed and pondered together.

I want you to imagine for a moment that the gospel, the good news, that God's love is like a dandelion. Now I know that may be hard for some of you because some of you may have plucked up dandelions out of our lawn thinking they were weeds. Some of you may even have sprayed chemicals on them trying to get rid of them. But if you have, then you will just have to imagine a little harder. Imagine God's love is like a dandelion. A dandelion starts out as a seed and that seed finds fertile soil, and it can find it just about anywhere, in the most unlikely of conditions, the harshest environments, but there it is and it grows into a plant, and gets bigger and older and when it is ready, it flowers bright and yellow. And then it gets even older and turns into a puff ball like these ones. That is when it is most ripe, and ready to fly.

And then one day when it is just ready, and the wind is just right, all the little bits of fluff carrying seeds of the dandelion, are blown free and they fly, and fly, and fly until they come to

rest in a place where,, it starts out as a seed, and that seed finds fertile soil, and it can find it just about anywhere... I want you to imagine God's love like that.

Think of the lives of the disciples and how this gospel happened for them. God's gospel love was wandering along the beach in Galilee and it called a few fisherfolk, and they came. And it found fertile soil among these women and men. Especially among the poor, on the margins of society, prostitutes, tax collectors, people living in social isolation, struggling with the harsh economic and political realities, this was especially fertile ground for a gospel that reached into these troubled times and troubled lives with a word of dignity, respect, tenderness, strength and hope.

Well that gospel love having taken root in the lives and imaginations of that cluster of outcasts in Galilee was nurtured by Jesus, in his life and teaching, in the way he treated people, spoke to people, stuck up for people against Roman and religious rule-keepers. And so the gospel love grew in them, came to full and hope-filled flower in them. And then, after a time, it was tested by this death experience. Not just death, but struggle, pain and death. Jesus' death. The life-giver's death. And this gospel love withered in them for a while. It looked like it was gone.

But actually it wasn't gone. That harsh experience transformed it in them. It didn't look anything like it did before, but under the heat of struggle and grief it did not die. Actually it ripened. The struggle, the grief, the pain, seemingly so pointless, was the very thing that took this gospel love from full flower to seed bundle- loose and ready.

And that is when Pentecost happened. These are the same people on that Pentecost day- the same fisher folk, prostitutes, tax collectors, limping and lovely, who have been caught up in gospel love, put through trial, and now they are ready. They probably don't even know it themselves but the gospel seed is ready in them- ready to burst in them.

And then the spirit blows, fills the room, fills the place, fills all hearts and minds, creates language and understanding where all before had been babel, breaks down walls of power that before had kept people apart. And the seeds of gospel love scatter once again, only this time, through them. They who had been the soil have now become the seed bearers carried on the winds of Ruach, God's breath, blowing in them, carrying this gospel love in them to fertile soil. And it lands. It lands in Lydia's community in Philippi, and it lands in the heart of a Roman soldier, and it lands, by extension and over time the little blue church in Penticton where I first saw it, or on prairie soil where you first experienced it, or on the streets of Walley where gospel love is experienced through food off the back of a truck, or in a clothing closet.

Friends, where did you first experience this gospel love? How would you tell the story of the seed of gospel love that exists in your life. Are you fertile soil, just waiting for it to land somehow longing for that purpose, direction, meaning, to land and take root in your life? Are you in that new place of feeling a new love, fresh good news growing in your life? It is springtime in your life, and the message, God's good news alive and growing. The teachings of Jesus inspire and excite, and you can sense the life in them. Are you going through the trial, the dark night, the life and death experience that threatens the whole thing and it all feels so fragile. Or are you on the other side of that, where this gospel, this faith, this love that has been planted in your heart and your life has grown and faced the slings and arrows, and sits ripe and full, held loosely, ready to ride the winds wherever they may take you.

I believe that our faith has a life cycle that we live, and I am convinced we live this cycle over and over again. It is never quite the same each time. I remember doing my undergrad studies at UBC as an 18 year old- first time one my own, more ready to party than to study really. I did ok. I passed. I was interested in religious studies and psychology. I did fairly well. But the second time around, when I went back, it was different. Same process, but a whole different story the second time around, because I was different. And today we celebrate that

moment in the cycle when we feel the winds of God, the breath of God, the Ruach shake us from the place we have been, lifts us and sends us out anew. We celebrate that moment when that gospel love is ready, potent. I am not talking about the kind of evangelical sharing of the gospel message- a sending out to save of souls. I am talking about a gospel love, a kind of love that is fresh and powerful and courageous, that can face anything with grace and strength, a tenacious dandelion weed type love that takes root in the cracks of unjust systems and changes them. I am talking about a love that changes lives and worlds that, somewhere along the line will be ready, will feel the Ruach, breath of the spirit, and will land, and will make all the difference.

Come Holy Spirit. Blow on this field of disciples, and as we are ready, carry this love that you have stirred within us to the place it is most deeply needed. By your Spirit, let it make all manner of loving difference. Amen.