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SERMON for PENTECOST

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Years ago I went to the city of Amiens in northern France because of the labyrinth in the cathedral there. I booked a room at a small hotel so I could spend several days walking the labyrinth. You know - like a pilgrimage. But... when I arrived I found the labyrinth covered with chairs. OH NO! I tried and tried to find someone who would tell me why those chairs were there. And for how long! Finally I approached one of the guides who took groups around the cathedral. I worked out how to ask my question in French, using words and grammar I was sure of. And then I asked him 'When would the chairs be removed from the labyrinth as I would like to walk.' He listened carefully to me, only just as I got to the end of my sentence he shook his head ever so slightly. Oops! I realized I'd used the Spanish word for walk. Quickly I corrected myself and he beamed at me. Then he answered me in French - 'It's Pentecost. There'll be services with lots of people coming.' Right! Pentecost! Bigger than Christmas in France. Then he asked me - in French - 'Would I like to converse in English?' Yes! I would! I had a thousand questions for him and for the next few hours we talked and talked about buildings and people and cultures. That was one of the kindest and most respectful encounters I've ever had. Kindness. An essential component of the Kingdom. A sign of God's Truth present on Earth.

We heard Jesus say it in the Gospel today: *"Nevertheless I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Advocate will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you."* And also:  
*"When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth"*

Where do we need truth most in this world? Is it in the places where bombs are falling and children and grandparents are being killed in their kitchens, at their tables, in their beds? Or is it in the places where children cry themselves to sleep with bellies distended from hunger? Or is it in northern Manitoba where a 7 year old girl tries to commit suicide and is so close to successful that she now lingers on life support in an urban hospital? Perhaps it's on this island where there is not enough affordable housing for young families or for seniors?

How can we say really, where we most need truth, where we most need the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, Bright Flame of Life, Great Wind of God, to come and clear out all lies, all corruption, all greed, all presence of Evil. Where do you or I most need that cleansing Breath of God to show up in our own lives? What do we most need it to clear out in our own inner world? It's a huge question, isn't it! A question that can bring us to our knees, make us want to run the other way, hide our eyes, turn away our hearts and close the doors against that great cleansing wind and fire.

BUT... what if instead we see it as gift? The most generous and life-affirming gift you've ever received. The gift that will transform your life and your living into something that brings you more and more alive every moment. The gift that opens your heart wider and wider with every breath you take. The gift that shifts your thinking from "I can't" and "that will never work" to "I wonder..." and "what if...".

Those kinds of questions give the boot to those shadowy parts of ourselves that focus on the tiny and the mingy and the mean. The shadowy parts of ourselves that don't believe we're truly capable of transformation or of shining enough kindness and love and light to make a real difference in the state of the world.

Well this is it. The Day of Pentecost. The day when God reminds us - we are not alone. God is with us in every breath we take. LIFE in all its abundance and glory is available to us. We can draw it down into the world and start spreading it around. We're talking transformation. We're talking about opening the doors of our minds and expanding our thinking to embrace what yesterday we believed was impossible. We've been living that, haven't we? Been learning about the impossible becoming possible. The Holy Spirit is here to help us with that. Here to show us LOVE in action. LOVE in beliefs. LOVE in every breath we take.

And who knows... Maybe when you leave here today you'll have an impulse. Maybe you'll go online to the Anglican Church Website and donate to the church in Jerusalem. Maybe you'll donate more than you think is wise. Or maybe you'll phone up someone you're angry with and begin rebuilding the bridge between you. Maybe you'll make a big batch of sandwiches and go down to Centennial Park and eat them with the homeless people that hang around there, eat them while getting to know who they are. Maybe you'll let the Holy Spirit in and see what happens next. God knows we've got to get serious about the Kingdom here on earth. It won't happen without us. God's hands are tied until we move into action.

And it's in the words of Jesus that we find the crucial instructions on how we can do this. Only if Jesus leaves the disciples will the Advocate, the Holy Spirit be able to come and empower them. Only if they give him up, confront their grief, live with that huge loss, will they be able to make room in their hearts for a new way. There is the key. IN order to make room for the new we have to let go of what no longer serves us. No matter how much we love the old ways, only in their dying and our dying to them will we be freed to embrace the new world Jesus wants for us. God wants for us. All of us. We will need not only faith and inquiring minds but courage and love. And then we too will be enflamed with the Holy Spirit, empowered to remake our world as the Kingdom. Just like the disciples, for us too out of loss come some of our greatest transformations. Through loss we gain clarity. Insight. Understanding. Which in turn propels us forward into acts of kindness. Generosity. Compassion. Truth-telling. Thanks be to God for loss. May *your* losses be an unending source of life and light and courage in your life.  
Amen.