



Sermon by the Right Reverend John R. Stephens

June 5, 2022 Year C Pentecost

Readings: Acts 2: 1-21; Psalm 104: 25-35; Romans 8: 14-17; John 14: 8-17

EPISCOPAL VISIT TO HOLY TRINITY, NEW WESTMINSTER

It is great to be with you at Holy Trinity Cathedral this morning. The pandemic, which still is hanging around with us, has been such a difficult time for churches. While we have wanted to keep people safe, we have also wanted to gather as a community to worship and share in the sacraments. It has not been an easy balance. Thank you to all of you for your attention to detail and the possibilities that you created. I am also grateful to your Vicar, Archdeacon Richard for so many things, but if I were to name only a few: his leadership in the parish related to the development project, his commitment to worship, pastoral care and preaching in these trying times. I am also so appreciative of Richard's work in the diocese as an Archdeacon and many places where he generously shares his talents and time and thank you to all of you for sharing him as he gives much of himself to this diocese, archdeaconry and many parishes. I thank Monte, your Assistant Curate for his commitment to learning and growing as a priest under the guidance of Richard and all of you. Please keep him in your prayers as he prepares for ordination, God willing, next Saturday. I thank Carole for her ministry as your Deacon, holding both the needs of the world and the parish together. Thank you to all of you for your ministry and presence in the community of New Westminster. It is good to be with you.

It wasn't all that long ago when I received an email that told me that I could receive one million dollars. It was a little complicated, but it involved a prince in a far away place who was having trouble getting money out of that country. If I followed the instructions and

responded to the email and sent them some money to help with the process of releasing the funds and then waited a few weeks, the one million dollars would be placed in my bank account. I got so excited. A million dollars, wow! Just think of what I could do with all that cash. Now granted a million dollars does not go quite as far as it used to but surely it would be enough to make a great impact. I could keep some and give away lots. I could help some people in need, donate it to the church, support a variety of charities and also make some repairs around the house. Maybe we could go on a great trip, or support the Primate's World Relief and Development Fund or both, or maybe... Lots of things crossed my mind in a short time.

I didn't respond to the email though, as I was completely convinced that it was all a ruse. But it felt rather strange to receive the message. From out of nowhere a huge sum of money dangled in front of me that I could potentially use in a number of ways for better or worse, for new vision or old, for bettering the world or to be squirreled away.

This morning our readings are centred upon a gift from God. A gift not in the form of cash but something rather different. But in a funny way we have treated it much like a hoax or certainly as unrelated to our lives and our purpose. For we heard: "When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them." Those were the words we heard. And like the potential gift of a million dollars, people have wondered ever since what the gift of the Holy Spirit really means. The day of Pentecost in the Bible is filled with wind and fire, with new voices and new languages, with seeing visions and dreaming dreams. And since then, the Spirit has mostly been encouraged to be stuffed away again as quickly as she descended. She brought chaos and change and insight and new direction and random possibilities we quickly worked out ways to predictability, careful planning, and organized thought. The response to the fire and wind; to the new energy and new focus; to the awareness that God is present in any and all situations; that God is unpredictable and undefinable, the response to this was... well... was to create creeds or theological statements or definitions all of which simply fall far short of an understanding the Holy Spirit as one coming to shake and disturb.

In the Apostles' Creed we are not quite sure how to define the Holy Spirit at all, for in that Creed, to say that we have tried to tame her and keep this Holy Spirit as, well, as boring as possible really, is an understatement. For we say, I believe in God the Holy Spirit... and that is about it. There is no sense of wind, or urgency, or calling, or hope. No sense of a new fire burning, no sense of renewal, of energy, of vision. The Holy Spirit simply is and we don't quite know what to do with her the creed implies. And the same has been true in lots of places in the Church and in lots of our lives.

I think the Church, the holy catholic Church, the universal Church, has completely missed the point here. I think we have missed that the Spirit, the Holy Spirit, is seen all over the place, all around us, bringing changes, a rethinking, a renewal, a reworking and often the Church simply ignores it or rebukes it. And the Spirit, this Holy Spirit, well she continues to

descend, continues to spark, continues to make waves, continues to stir up, continues to open things that have been carefully shut.

I was reading a poem this week, written by John O'Donohue, who calls it *In Praise of Fire*. Let me read a portion for you:

*Let us praise the grace and risk of Fire...  
As air intensifies the hunger of fire, may the thought of death  
Breathe new urgency into our love of life.  
As fire cleanses dross, may the flame of passion burn away what is false.  
As short as the time from spark to flame, so brief may the distance be between heart  
and being  
May we discover beneath our fear embers of anger to kindle justice.  
May courage cause our lives to flame,  
in the name of the Fire, and the Flame and the Light.<sup>1</sup>*

We may pray this, we may even desire this, we may even get excited by this but what did the Holy Spirit come to ignite? To me she is about the coming of a new breath, a new vision, a new wisdom, a whole new concept of God, a whole new perspective that our faith really matters, a whole new outlook in recognizing God, recognizing the Holy, recognizing fire and wonder and beauty and wind and energy and reconnection and new life all around us and even within us. The Holy Spirit separates any distance between us and God, touching our heart and soul in places and people and things all around.

This Holy Spirit is still very much with us. We see her in what we might deem strange places working through artists, musicians, dancers, and weavers. We see her in writers, poets, singers, laughers, and dreamers. We see her in works of compassion, justice, democracy, wonder and joy. We see her in love, in birth, in life, in death. She spins all around us and, if we are willing, even through us, inviting us to rethink, reengage, renew and grow in trust and faith.

John McLuckie of the Iona Community wrote this prayer:

Holy, sprightly Spirit of God, we delight at your dancing among us, filling the world with joyful possibility, revealing the music of the Creator.

We rejoice at your daring spontaneity and find ourselves caught off guard by your unexpected communications.

In a world that can seem predictable, you spark into being new possibilities: You gently purge our sin in the warmth of your breath, freeing us from our bondage of past wrong. In a world that can seem drab, you weave your ever-changing patterns into the fabric of our beings. In a world that can seem hostile, your mediating love builds a path from loneliness to conviviality, from antagonism to cooperation. In a world that can appear purposeless, your vitality shouts out a mighty "Yes" to life and declares the source of all living to be the One from whom you proceed, the Father and Mother, Creator and Lover of

---

<sup>1</sup> In *To Bless the Space Between Us* by John O'Donohue page 12

all. We make our prayer in the name of Jesus who promised your coming and reigns with you in the eternal fellowship of the Creator, one perfect Trinity of love. Amen.

And so, when you hear laughter recognize the Holy Spirit. When you know love recognize the Holy Spirit. When you are touched by beauty or wonder, or graciousness or gratitude recognize the Holy Spirit. When you are determined to speak against something that is wrong, when music touches your soul, when a stranger brings tears of joy to your eyes, when a child smiles at you, when an elder reaches out to you, recognize the Holy Spirit. When concern for the environment or for peace or for justice stirs something deep within the very core of who you are, your soul, recognize the Holy Spirit. She is still with us, around us and wanting to work through us. She still prods us and pokes us and encourages us with flame and wind, love and connection, voices, and whispers that God is amongst and for us and calling us forward, not gripping tightly to the past but hopeful for a new path just like those first women and men who first followed Christ.

When we were baptized, we were baptized through the gift of this Spirit. This morning Cayleigh will be revealing this as she is confirmed. And so listen intently for the nudges, the voice, the stirrings of that Holy Spirit still amongst us despite some of our best efforts to keep her under control. She is not a hoax like that million-dollar email but a gift filled with the possibilities of a new heaven and a new earth. Do we have the courage to follow?

Come Holy Spirit Come.