



## **The Diocese of Kootenay Episcopal Election: January 19, 2019**

### **Archbishop Melissa M. Skelton**

#### **John 16: 4b-15**

“I did not say these things to you from the beginning, because I was with you. But now I am going to him who sent me; yet none of you asks me, ‘Where are you going?’<sup>6</sup> But because I have said these things to you, sorrow has filled your hearts. 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 when he comes, he will prove the world wrong about sin and righteousness and judgment: about sin, because they do not believe in me; about righteousness, because I am going to the Father and you will see me no longer; about judgment, because the ruler of this world has been condemned.

“I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own, but will speak whatever he hears, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me, because he will take what is mine and declare it to you. All that the Father has is mine. For this reason I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you.

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How do we solve a problem like the Spirit?  
How do we catch the wind and pin it down?  
How do we find a word that means the Spirit?  
A burning fire? Or tongues with wondrous sound?

Many a thing we know we'd like to tell her  
Many a thing we'd like to understand  
But how do we make her stay  
Remain with us all the day  
How do we keep a wave upon the sand?

Oh, how do we solve a problem like the Spirit?  
How do we hold a mystery in our hand?

On this solemn occasion you may well wonder why in the world I as your Archbishop would riff off of a song from *The Sound of Music*, especially one sung in the play by exasperated nuns as they recount the temperament and antics of the young woman Maria.

To be honest, riffing off of well-known tunes is a kind of obsession these days for me in that my dear husband is asked in his workplace to compose and to sing such ditties any time one of his colleagues retires and these days many of his colleagues are now retiring. And so as I came to this election, this important election, this tune immediately came to mind probably because it's about a group of people, a community of people, marveling about and, yes, mystified by a kind of energy in a person that can't be fully grasped or pinned down but that, as we know later in the play, has a life-giving effect at an important time on everyone.

And so for me, adapting this song is perfect for today. It's perfect, for, here you are, a community of people at an important time. Here you are, a community of people discerning and voting on your next bishop, after much discerning has already occurred. The election committee has done its discernment, the candidates have done their discernment, and you, the clergy and people of this diocese, have been doing your own discernment as you have prayed, poured over the nominees' materials, and been in conversation with each other.

We Anglicans, of course, believe that discernment is never something we do on our own. We do it under the guidance of and in companionship with the Holy Spirit—the Holy Spirit—the energy we believe brings the Church into being, holds the Church together, and empowers the Church to be Christ's body in and for the world.

In John's Gospel we hear Jesus talk about this Spirit as *parakletos*, the advocate or the companion, who will come upon the disciples at Jesus's departure to lead them into the truth that Jesus himself disclosed. It is out of this truth, Jesus' truth, that they are to find their compass, their inspiration and their energy. Biblical scholar Eugene Peterson, author of the Biblical translation called *The Message* translates *parakletos* as Friend. And so it is "the Friend" that Jesus will leave with the disciples, "the Friend" that has been this Diocese's helper in the time leading up to today, "the Friend" whose presence we will pray for in this Eucharist and in the election to follow.

But how do we recognize the arrival of the Holy Spirit, the Friend? How do we know the Spirit is really here? And how can we make ourselves available to be guided by her?

This brings me back to my song adaptation. For the Spirit can seem to some like a problem no one can really solve, a mystery impossible to grasp. On the one hand, as the Church, we're promised the utter dependability of the presence and action of the Spirit. And, at the same time, we want and do call out to the Spirit, we want and do look for her presence, we want and do strain all our senses toward her as if he were not here.

Why do we do this? We do this not in order to bring an absent Spirit into this place or into this process. Instead we call out to "the Friend," to the Spirit who is already here in order to open our capacity to sense her presence: in order to feel his breath upon us, in order to know her fire in our hearts, in order to drink in his refreshment like a cup of cold water, in order to experience anew the bonds she has built between and among us in the Church.

And so today, here in this Eucharist and in this election, the Spirit, “the Friend,” is not a problem to be solved but a reality to be depended upon. Today, the Spirit, “the Friend,” is not a mystery to leave us mystified but a mystery to be called out to, a mystery to be invited into our hearts and a mystery to be watched for, even though that mystery may at times seem hidden from us.

Earlier this week at a meeting of the House of Bishops, Primate Fred Hiltz shared this anonymous quote with us about the Primate’s election. I have adapted it for our use here today.

*“Today this Synod will elect a bishop for our church. We are being asked to do two things in that responsibility. The first is to take account of the trajectory of skill and accomplishment of relationship, of vision and care that brings each nominee to where we are today. But the other thing we are being asked to do is to remember and trust what we cannot see, and to remember, in prayer and in silence, that God sees what we cannot see, and to remember, in prayer and in silence, that God sees something in the lives of each of these people that is hidden from us, and maybe from them as well. Something is in play today that is more than our preferences, insights and choices though not less than them. Our ‘something’ is in fact Some One and that One calls out to more than we can see or know in the lives of each of us.*

*That might call us to reflect not only on the call of God (through the Spirit) to one in our midst to be bishop, but also to each of us to listen to what God will disclose to us about our purpose and our call. This is not just a day to reflect on the calling of someone to be bishop, but also a day to reflect on our call to be the Church together.”*