

Pentecost and Confirmation sermon

Today we are celebrating Pentecost and the Confirmation of the Baptism of Owen, Leonie, Ben and Felipe. Fifty days after Easter, we celebrate the Holy Spirit as God's presence within and among us. When I taught about Pentecost to my confirmands back in Brazil, to help them remember that Pentecost is 50 days after Easter, I would say: try to remember the word Penta (from Pentecost). Penta comes from Greek and means 5. Brazil is the only country that has won the Men's Soccer World Cup 5 times. So, Brazil is a Penta-champion. So, Penta, Penta-champion, Pentecost. Easy to remember. I'm not sure if they remember about Pentecost, but I am quite sure that they remember Brazil is penta-champion. Speaking of the World Cup, this year some games will take place here in Canada. Maybe Brazil can become Hexa-champion. Or Canada champion for the first time. Enough about soccer, back to Pentecost.

Pentecost derives its name from the Jewish festival called Shavuot, which takes place fifty days after Passover. The festival celebrates the harvest and also the giving of the 10 commandments to Moses on Mount Sinai.

Today's readings bring different perspectives about Pentecost: In Acts, the Spirit arrives in rushing wind and flame, bringing God's presence to the disciples. In Corinthians, apostle Paul reminds us that though we each have different capacities, we are unified in the Spirit that equips us with these gifts.

In the Gospel of John, Jesus breathed the Holy Spirit on his disciples, empowering them to forgive sins. And today, when we gather and celebrate Pentecost, we celebrate that we too are given the breath of the Holy Spirit and sent out to proclaim God's redeeming love to all the world.

But before Jesus breathed the Holy Spirit on the disciples, let us remember the circumstances in which they found themselves. It was right after Jesus' death, and the disciples were in Jerusalem, inside locked doors and afraid. They feared being killed just like Jesus was.

Fear can be described as an anguish that makes our heart heavy. Throughout our lives, I believe that many of us identify with or have already experienced situations of great anguish and fear. Fear when we or someone we love is very sick or going through a difficult situation. Or when we start

something new, perhaps, for the youth, a new school where we don't know anybody.

The disciples were behind locked doors and afraid. Their fear was of the religious and political authorities of the time. Today, many people around the world are under similar oppression and violence from political and religious authorities. Authorities who should instead protect and guide.

But the spirit revealed in and by Jesus is not of violence and oppression but is the spirit of life and reconciliation with God.

When Jesus gathers with his disciples, he assures them that they are not alone. The Holy Spirit that Jesus breathed on the disciples gave them courage, strength, and purpose. Although many of the first Christians were persecuted and killed by authorities, the purpose they received gave them the courage and strength to persist.

In today's Gospel, the purpose Jesus gives the disciples is to forgive sins. When discussing with our confirmands what sin is, we concluded that a sin can be understood as anything that hurts life. It can be something that hurts you, something that hurts the lives of the people around you, or something that hurts nature or life in society. Examples include countless wars, increasing violence against women and children and the LGBTQ community, and the destruction of nature. People and living beings are suffering as the consequence of sin.

If sin is something that hurts life, forgiveness, on the other hand, is reconciliation with God to protect life.

The Holy Spirit that was breathed on the disciples and gave them a purpose greater than their own lives is the same Holy Spirit that gathers us here today, and gives us strength, courage, and purpose.

May the Holy Spirit give us wisdom, strength, and purpose to protect life. So, take good care of yourself, take good care of the people around you, and let's work together, as community, to promote, protect, and advocate so that all lives can be lived with dignity.

The sin of greed, lies, corruption, and abuse of power has caused so much destruction. But we can not lose hope.

Although there are days that can feel heavier and longer, we should remember that we are not alone. The same breath that gave us life is also

with us, sustaining us, carrying us, and sending us out to proclaim God's redeeming love to all the world. Let's keep on the purpose.

And last but not least, today we have the confirmation of 4 youth. For almost 2 years, once a week, we had class, which were led by Lyndon and me. And I want to thank you, dear confirmands. It was a blessing to share Thursday afternoons with you. Thank you for teaching me, especially many new words in English. Thank you for being so consistent in attending classes; they almost never missed class, some coming directly from school on foot or by bus. Thank you for keeping me updated on various topics related to school, and they have a lot to talk about regarding school. There is always something new, 67 is already outdated, last week they taught me a new one: tiki tiki, which also doesn't mean anything.

With so many options you have, you came to share, talk, and learn about the path of faith of those who came before us, and about the love of God revealed in Jesus Christ to all of us. And this brought me much hope: 4 smart youth, full of energy, finding meaning in learning about the love of God. Confirmation is one of the steps in our long journey of faith, I hope you continue eager to keep learning.

You are great, and, in those difficult days, remember that you are deeply loved, and you are not alone.

May the Holy Spirit, the spirit of life, grant you wisdom, joy in the presence of God, and the purpose to promote and protect life.

When I asked if any of them would like to say something on the day of the confirmation as part of the sermon, they all said they would like to say something. As the spirit blesses us with various voices, we will hear a word of thanks from each of the 4 confirmands now.

Leonie: My time in confirmation has been an amazing experience; all the fun things and talking about together were always so fun.

While walking this path, I learned that things don't come naturally; things change. People and you change to adapt, but it's worth it because this is what I'm left with: amazing friendships, teachers, and new paths ahead of me.

This journey wouldn't have been possible without the help and support of my family, parents and grandparents, always constantly being there when I needed it. This community, for always being happy to see me. Ben, Felipe, and Owen, for being the best and most entertaining classmates. Finally, thank you Lyndon and especially Eli for teaching us so patiently about our faith. So, thank you to everyone who helped bring me here, in front of all of you.

Owen: I would like to thank my father and Eli for guiding me through confirmation and taking time to teach us. It was also interesting to learn about Luther's 95 thesis. I enjoyed spending time with my friends and playing music together.

Ben: Throughout confirmation, I have grown a lot as a Christian and as a person, and that's mainly thanks to Lyndon and Eli, who taught me all about morals, the Ten Commandments, the Lord's Prayer, and so much more. I also want to thank my family, who were really supportive and helpful throughout this journey.

I'm looking forward to being a part of this community and this congregation. I'm really excited to continue on my path of being a disciple of Christ and a worshiper of God.

Felipe: During the time of confirmation, we learned many things that strengthened our journey of faith. We started with the Old Testament, with Abraham and Sarah, then Moses and the prophets until we reached Jesus Christ, our Savior, and his teachings.

Our studies continued on the disciples, and the birth and development of the Christian Church. We also had the opportunity to learn about the Lutheran Reformation and its contribution to the world. We are very grateful for this community and for all the support we have always received. And, in this especial day of Pentecost, may the Holy Spirit continue helping us to sow God's love to the world. Amen.