



# OFFICE OF THE BISHOP OF NIAGARA

## ANGLICAN CHURCH OF CANADA

### The Bishop's Pentecost Message

May 19, 2024

Pentecost is a great feast in the life of the Church – some call it the Church's birthday. Of course, those early Christians who were trying so hard to do the right things in the days after Jesus' Resurrection and Ascension had absolutely no sense of the momentous edge they were standing on.

None until the Spirit arrived that is.

So there was a violent wind and then there was fire – and those came amidst the anxiety of a community that was huddled together in fear. That doesn't sound too comfortable to my ears.

Neither does the next bit of the story – suddenly the disciples are out on the busy streets of Jerusalem – apparently speaking all known languages in an ecstasy of the Holy Spirit. Nothing like a scene like that to dent your credibility with people who know what "right" religion looks like so it's no wonder that folks thought they were drunk.

The Spirit doesn't care about propriety though. Nor could we describe the Holy Spirit as easy. I reckon that the Spirit is grittier and more uncompromising and demanding than we'd like most days. And yet there's something very beautiful about the presence of the Holy Spirit too.

The anointing dove, the rushing wind, the enlivening fire, the cleansing water - all these are images for the spirit. Jesus calls the spirit the Comforter, the Advocate, the spirit of truth. The Holy Spirit is part of that beautiful mystery of the triune God – the three in one.

What can we say about the effects of the Spirit's presence? Well, we know it when we feel it and see it, that's for sure.

It's an incredible gift. It's that profoundly wonderful thing that happens to believers when their hearts are strangely warmed and changed, to quote a famous Christian: the great John Wesley.

When we suddenly get a glimpse of heaven, when something is accomplished here on Earth that we none of us expected or could have predicted.

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The Holy Spirit provides us with strength in adversity, unexpected generosity, she is the bringer of peace and understanding, the lover of community, the great persuader, the protector, and the emboldener.

But there's something here that important for us to notice about the Spirit's presence - actually it's crucial for us to notice - and that's how the Spirit works. It's easy to mischaracterize if we're not paying attention. You see the Spirit acts with us; alongside us. But we have to be in that partnership.

And I think it is the Spirit's ability to come alongside us and to embolden us to transcend difference, to restore communication and unity, to breathe bravery on the fearful in the way Saint Luke describes the day of Pentecost that helps us see how she works.

That group of huddled, stressed apostles became a transformed group; this remnant of the Jesus community, who had gathered together out of shared fear and a need for mutual comfort. And after days - weeks - of making themselves scarce, the scripture tells us they were suddenly speaking boldly.

A people who had earlier been silent out of fear, were now speaking about God's powerful works. It was a truly transformative moment when the Jesus community was itself resurrected and new life was breathed into frightened, tentative, and confused people.

That can't help but prompt me to ask myself - and all of us in Niagara - where is the Holy Spirit leading us? Because you see, the Spirit is with us always - in every age. Right here, in Niagara-on-the-Lake, in Port Colborne, in Hamilton, in Smithville, in Arthur, in Guelph and in Oakville too. Right here. Right now.

Where is the Holy Spirit breathing peace and comfort onto our fears and comforting us in order to embolden us to act in God's name for God's mission right here and right now?

Good questions to ask and to pray about on this day when we celebrate the coming of the Advocate, the Comforter.

Happy Pentecost! May the Holy Spirit make us bold in proclaiming the good news, and may the Spirit guide and protect us all.



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