

Day of Pentecost – Year C

Acts 2:1-21

GOD'S SPIRIT KNOWS NO LIMIT

I was pleased to hear about the Dr. Evan Jones' lecture that will be happening at the Sheila NaGeira Theatre on the fourteenth of June. Dr. Jones has been conducting some extensive research concerning the friars who came over with John Cabot's 1498 expedition and may have established a religious colony right here in Carbonear. If this proves to be the case, it would be the first Christian settlement in North America. I find this to be interesting and exciting news on this Sunday as our thoughts turn to the Day of Pentecost – the day when the Christian church was born. Pentecost raises questions for Christian people.

How did we get here? Not how did we get here with all of our differing opinions, conflicting doctrines, and opposing ideas of how to truly be the church. That's easy to explain. Humans are diverse. Differences among Christian people are understandable. The Bible is a complex, sometimes conflicting, multi-opinionated book. No wonder there are many disagreements over its interpretation. So, it's not "how did we get here?" on this Sunday morning. But how did we get here together in this particular place. I've been reading your history, the history of Bethany United as it is presented on our website, and I find it very interesting. How did all of us here today called Bethany United Church, get here in this congregation of Christian people?

If we take the Bible to be true, we all began with Adam and Eve back in the garden of Eden. No matter if we believe it or not – we had to begin somewhere. And as time passed we grew and we multiplied and we became more and more and more. In time we were scattered to the four winds. As time passed we began to speak different languages and soon we couldn't understand one another. Depending on where we lived, we had little in common. Instead of the small group that started out, we became a gathering of strangers. Then on the first Day of Pentecost the Holy Spirit descended, and what happened? People began to talk in their many different languages and wonder of wonders, they could all understand one another. People who were complete strangers were made into one family. It was the birthday of the Christian Church! That's what we're celebrating

today. Now do you see how we got here? We are here all together on this very day, not because we share the same opinions. Not because we are all on the same socio-economic level. Not because we all have the same backgrounds. Not because we all have the same skin color, or the same brain power. We are here as the miraculous, unexpected work of God's Holy Spirit. The fact that we are gathered here at Bethany on this Sunday morning is nothing less than a miracle of the Risen Christ. Brought about by what happened on that first Easter morning. The miracle is being enacted right now. There are things that I don't like about you, and there are things that you don't like about me. But all that is beside the point. We have heard the call of Jesus to be disciples, and each one of us in his or her own way has responded to that call. And God has put us here in this church together. Pentecost continues. Right here. Right now.

I was talking to a woman about the United Church of Canada. She said, "Part of me hates it, and another part of me dearly loves it." She said, "Before I came here I was fairly content with myself. My life was my own. I could do whatever I wanted to do. Then the United Church of Canada took me to Haiti and made me help people who were dying in poverty and I discovered that their faith was stronger than my own. I could have had a good life without the church but now those poor, destitute strangers in Haiti have become my obsession. It feels like they are my own family." And as I listened I realized that the Holy Spirit continues to make families where there was once only strangers. It didn't only happen in the upper room on that first Pentecost; it continues to happen to this very day in places like Bethany United Church.

Many years ago I worked with a young man in Labrador who was an interpreter for the United Nations. He was in Labrador for the summer. From him I learned that the UN hires hundreds of translators. When a UN delegate gives a speech those translators work in the background. They wear headsets which allows them to hear what is being said by the delegate giving the speech in his or her own language. The key to the magic is not the headset – it is the translators who are off-camera listening and translating in real time. It really is amazing. Writing in the Book of Acts, Luke tells us that the first Pentecost was like that. All the people heard what was being said in their own language. But there were no headsets. There were no translators. It was a miracle.

This Holy Spirit language is a great mystery. It's like the air we breathe. Like the wind that cools us on a warm day. We can't see it, but we know it's there because we can feel it. The Holy Spirit is God becoming a part of us. It fills us with new life and a new way of seeing things we may have seen differently before. And when trouble comes it gives us peace, comfort, and joy. Take a deep breath and say, "Thanks be to God." Amen.