

# Pentecost Sunday

May 23, 2021

## Welcome/Announcements

*(voice over) We welcome you to this time of worship and as we do so, we acknowledge that McClure United Church stands on treaty 6 territory and homeland of the Metis Nation. We pay our respect to elders both past and present, wherever we find ourselves today. We also acknowledge our commitment as an Affirming Ministry of the United Church of Canada as we strive to be an open-minded, inclusive and welcoming place of worship. It is our hope that no matter your age, race, class, ability, gender, gender identity and sexual orientation, you will feel the warmth and blessing of God's love today. And we give thanks to God for this opportunity to gather together for worship, reflection, song and prayer. May you feel the God's blessing upon you today.*

Good morning and welcome to worship with us here today on this day of Pentecost as we consider all the ways that God continues to breathe life and hope into the Christian church. Those signs of hope are all around us too... There is just something about the greening of trees, the appearance of flowers – even dandelions... that I find incredibly hopeful. And this year... for the first time... Jordan and I have planted a little garden. We have no idea really what we're doing but we live in hope that despite our lack of knowledge... something amazing is about to happen. So many wonderful things are already happening... some of them we can see and some of them are happening.. just below the surface – all we need is to trust and be patient.

I don't really have much in the way of announcements today.

Our book club has just started a new book called *Anxious People* by Fredrik Backman. If you're interested in joining in our email discussions, please let me know. You have one month to read it and discussions begin on June 15. I admit I had my doubts about an email book club but this has been surprisingly great. I love reading everyone's thoughts and following the discussions shared through email. Everyone is welcome to join at any time.

We are going to continue with coffeetime on Fridays at 10am on Zoom and we may be in a position soon to start an outdoor parking lot coffee time during the week as well. Bible Study continues until the end of June as well as the youth and children's ministry programs.

We are hiring two young folks to help us out during the summer months with programming, thanks to the government summer job grant. So if you have ideas for things you'd like to do this summer, please let me know. I will be sharing more information about the summer staff next week.

Lets breathe deeply now of God's abundant love... as we prepare ourselves for this time of worship.

## **Call to Worship**

When the Day of Pentecost arrived the disciples were all gathered in one place. And the Spirit of God fell upon them like the rush of a violent wind. And every year when the church gathers to remember, all the people wonder what that moment would have felt like.

Except maybe... Saskatchewan people..

We know what wind feels like. We know how it can be gentle and playful one minute and strong and unnerving the next.

We have watched the wind dance across a field of wheat and thought "how perfect". We have listened as the wind howls at night bringing the rain and thought "Just in time". We have braced ourselves against the wind each spring and thought, "change is coming".

On this day, as the church celebrates Pentecost, as the spring wind blows and promises to bring warmer days, we join our hearts in praise of the one who sets it racing. We hear the call to join its dance, to allow exuberance to fill our bodies and our souls. We join our voices to those dreamers who started the song generations ago: "Come Holy Spirit, come!"

**Dare to dance with dreamers, sing their song,  
Dare to dance their stories, sing out strong.  
Dare to dance with freedom your whole life long,  
Dare to dance again!**

This is the call!

The flames of the Spirit beckon.

**We are ready to hear the story of new life and new beginnings!**

The wind of the Spirit moves.

**We are ready to join the dance bringing justice and peace to the world**

God, the Creator, is with us in this place and we rejoice.

**For we are Pentecost People!**

Let us pray:

Holy One, Justice-Seeker, Lover of Creation –

Praise to you for your indwelling Spirit

that moves within our lives.

Come and dance with us, engage with us, as we seek you –

so that we can be risen with Christ and in Christ.

Be with us now, we pray. Amen.

**Song: Dance with the Spirit** - Coulthard Family

**Scripture: Ezekiel 37:1-12, 14**

The hand of the LORD came upon me, and brought me out by the Spirit and set me down in the middle of a valley; it was full of bones. God led me all around them; there were very many lying in the valley, and they were very dry.

God said to me, "Mortal, can these bones live?" I answered, "O Lord GOD, you know."

The God said to me, "Prophecy to these bones, and say to them: O dry bones, hear the word of the

LORD. Thus says the Lord GOD to these bones: I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live. I will lay sinews on you, and will cause flesh to come upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and you shall live; and you shall know that I am the LORD."

So I prophesied as I had been commanded; and as I prophesied, suddenly there was a noise, a rattling, and the bones came together, bone to its bone. I looked, and there were sinews on them, and flesh had come upon them, and skin had covered them; but there was no breath in them.

Then God said to me, "Prophesy to the breath, prophesy, mortal, and say to the breath: Thus says the Lord GOD: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live."

I prophesied as God commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood on their feet, a vast multitude.

Then God said to me, "Mortal, these bones are the whole house of Israel. They say, 'Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost; we are cut off completely.'

Therefore prophesy, and say to them, Thus says the Lord GOD: I am going to open your graves, and bring you up from your graves, O my people; and I will bring you back to the land of Israel. I will put my spirit within you, and you shall live, and I will place you on your own soil; then you shall know that I, the LORD, have spoken and will act," says the LORD.

### **Sermon**

Dem bones, dem bones, dem dry bones.

Dem bones, dem bones, dem dry bones.

Dem bones, dem bones, dem dry bones.

Now hear the word of the Lord.

Quite an image, isn't it...the valley of dry bones...

And not just bones... but dry bones...

as I hold this image from the passage in Ezekiel –

bone upon bone - in what I imagine to be a dark and desolate valley, I can't help but feel something like a moment of fear... angst.

It isn't exactly an image of hope, is it?

Or is it?

The prophet Ezekiel was a priest who had been exiled along with many of the rest of his people to Babylon...

people would come to him and he would share his prophecies with them.

And these were a people who were looking for... who desperately needed... two things:

They needed honesty, and they needed hope.

And in his prophecies Ezekiel brought both.

First he told the truth.

He talked about the exile, and he talked about the ways that the people had fallen short of God's expectation.

He talked about how they were in a place that they never expected to be...  
and about how everything had changed.

But then he also talked about hope.

He talked about how one day they would return to Jerusalem from Babylon ...  
and the temple would be rebuilt, and they would find new life.

And he had this vision... and the one that was sung about in that old spiritual I attempted to sing a  
second ago....

A vision of the valley of dry bones.

Ezekiel is led by God to this valley that is filled with bones.

Layers upon layers of bones.

And there is no sign of life anywhere.

And it looks like the epitome of hopelessness and death and destruction.

And God says to Ezekiel, "do you think these bones can live again?"

they look pretty dead to me... and I'm an optimist

But Ezekiel had a curious response... he says "oh God...you know".

God tells Ezekiel to start prophesying.

In other words.. to start talking about the future.

And as he does, God starts working too.

The bones come together and connect.

I can just hear the rattling as the toe bone connected to the foot bone and the foot bone connected to  
the ankle bone and the ankle bone connected to the knee bone... and so on and so on

And then they become flesh and blood again.

And then, God tells Ezekiel to keep talking... and something incredible happens.

They are filled with breath again...

and the ones that had just been bones stand up and breathe, and are filled with new life.

God tells Ezekiel that the bones are symbols of the people of Israel, who had fallen mightily.

And God shows him that they will be brought back to their feet.

They will find new life.

They will live again.

God promises that.

God gives them hope.

This is not a story of death... of despair... of hopelessness...

This is a powerful story of hope...

It's a story of resurrection and new life.

A perfect story for this Pentecost Sunday when we celebrate the birth of the church.

A perfect story for us... as a community... as we move towards the end of this pandemic... and into a  
time of renewal in our own church... and hopefully in our personal lives too.

For the most part this community is in a pretty good place.

It's been a tough... a really tough.. year and a half, but overall I believe we are pretty darn blessed.

We are far from a pile of lifeless bones.

There is life among us... that is so true.

But there is also exhaustion among us...  
there is the sense of being overwhelmed...  
of being too busy...  
of lacking the energy... the motivation... to move our bones...  
bones that might very well feel disconnected... It might be that we are just too  
tired/busy/overwhelmed to open our lungs and inhale deeply of that life-giving, energizing, breathe of  
God.

As we begin to consider what life might be like post-pandemic... I've heard many express  
uncertainty... trepidation... maybe even fear.

All of these are completely normal responses to what we have experienced and to the unknown is  
ahead of us.

But I'm not actually terribly worried about those things...  
I'm not worried about the fear and discomfort...  
and I'd be lying if I didn't admit that I feel them myself.

What does worry me though is something far more destructive than fear...  
far more destructive than discomfort and concern...  
its apathy... or complacency that worries me.  
That, in my mind, is way more on par with death...  
Death, in this story, is the lack of openness to... or inability to even recognize God's life-breathing...  
life-energizing spirit.

I have had a couple of personal Pentecost experiences lately, I'd like to share with you. By this I  
mean times when I felt the excitement... the joy... the energy of God's spirit move through me,  
inspiring, encouraging and deepening my faith.

One of them happened a few weeks ago when I put out my kindness garden at home.  
Jordan and I were getting ready for supper when the doorbell rang.  
Standing outside our door... in the rain... was a young man. He said:  
"you don't know me but I was just walking by and saw your kindness garden and I needed to stop and  
say thank you.  
I needed to see this." At this point he started sobbing apologetically.  
He said the garden made him smile and he almost walked by but something told him he had to stop  
and come speak to us.  
And so he did.  
We chatted with him for a bit and he continued to thank us and cry.  
I have no idea what was going on for him internally...  
he did say that he had immigrated from Iran... but he kept saying that his tears were tears of joy and  
gratitude.  
As we said goodbye and closed the door, I was overcome with my own gratitude that something so  
simple as some stones with messages of hope and joy could open someone up to such emotion.

To be honest, I created the kindness garden as a way of balancing my own heavy emotions and  
feelings of exhaustion.  
And let me tell you that during and after this encounter... these dead tired bones came alive.

The second Pentecost-bones-come-alive story I want to share is about the weekly young adult group I've been leading since last April.

An amazing group of young adults right across Canada have been coming together each week to talk about life, faith and to have some fun together.

What started as a group of people who didn't really know each other has turned into a very close group of friends.

It has been amazing to be part of this.

And this itself is a come-alive story but that's not all.

One of the participants... Jayden... is a young man from Swift Current.

Jayden has down's syndrome.

A couple of weeks ago we were having a discussion about mental health... sharing struggles and resources for help.

Jayden sat quietly for most of the discussion and once almost everyone else had shared, he put up his hand to speak.

What he said left everyone in the group either in tears or close to it.

I watched the expressions on everyone's face and saw in them an awakening of sorts... as they listened intently to what he had to say.

Jayden shared with us some of his own struggles and then began to talk about his families commitment to "feeding the good wolf".

For those of you unfamiliar with the story of the good wolf... its about an elder man and his grandson. In the story the man tells the boy that there is an endless struggle that goes on inside everyone. Its between two wolves.

One wolf is bad... he is unnecessary anger, envy, regret, greed, arrogance, resentment, lies, superiority and ego.

The other wolf is good – he is joy, peace, love, hope, serenity, humility, kindness, empathy, generosity, truth, compassion and faith.

The grandson asked which wolf would win. The elder answered, "the one you feed".

So Jayden's mom had told this story and encouraged her children to feed the good wolf and this has become a way of life for them.

Jayden then told us that we needed to be grateful... to look for good things and to help everyone. He encouraged us saying that if we did these things, everything would be ok.

I noticed when he was finished speaking that everyone was sitting up a little straighter... or leaning in a little deeper...

it was almost like some bones had come to life.

By the way, if you'd like to meet Jayden and hear more about his story, watch today's Theme Conversation.

Jayden and I Zoom together and talk about how he dares to dream with so much hope.

You can see for yourself his daring, courageous and loving spirit.

There is no doubt we are in the midst of change... we have been for a very long time – even before the pandemic as we changed our staffing and committed ourselves to a time of renewal.

As I mentioned earlier, I have spoken with a number of people who are quite cautious about these changes.

I've also spoken with people who are super excited and ready to see what the next thing brings.

But mostly, I think, I've spoken with people who I would say are expressing feelings that could be defined as "cautiously optimistic".

And I dunno...

Something about this phrase bugs me...

If you're going to be optimistic... be fully optimistic.

If we throw caution into the mix... I wonder if we can be truly optimistic?

Cautious optimism makes me think of someone trying to run up a downward moving escalator.

Not super productive.

You'll might get to where you need to go eventually but its going to take a lot more work... a lot more energy and time than is necessary.

So I'd like to propose a different expression that I'd like us to consider embracing...

to reflect on and use in own faith journeys...

as well as here... in our faith community...

"radically hopeful"

Doesn't that sound awesome?

Radically hopeful.

I am a radically hopeful person.

We are a radically hopeful community.

Don't quite feel it?

Well what if you just keep saying it.

I am radically hopeful.

We're radically hopeful.

If I keep telling myself that.. I will live into it.

I'm sure of it.

If we keep telling ourselves that...

possibilities are truly endless.

Now look... I do not want anyone to feel like I am diminishing your doubts or fears or like I'm telling you its not okay to have them.

Remember when I said earlier... that its not fear or discomfort that worries me?

We just must must must not allow fear and discomfort to prevent us from risking faith...

To prevent us from daring hope.

If we do, it is quite possible that we will slip into that thing that does cause me to worry... complacency...

when bodies become piles of lifeless, disconnected, dry bones.

Lets remember those first disciples who, after Jesus had gone, were huddled in a room together... uncertain and full of fear.

The story in the book of Acts tells us that on the day of Pentecost a great wind blew through the room and filled them all with the Holy Spirit.

I doubt this meant they had no more fear...

that suddenly they were filled with certainty...

but it did move them, inspire them and give them the courage they needed to leave that place...

to go out into the world and be the love they were meant to be.

We are meant to be love...  
to be radically hopeful people.

And we do this.... together... by risking faith and by daring hope.

We do this by opening ourselves to receive the life-giving, life-energizing breath of God.

Amen.

## **Music: Spirit of Gentleness**

### **Prayers of the People**

Spirit of Joy—kindle our enthusiasm and delight for each new day you give us; shower us with laughter, we pray.

Spirit of Truth—blow down the walls of deception and lies that surround us and that live within our hearts. Help us remember that the truth will set us free, even if it makes us uncomfortable for a time!

Spirit of Life—sweep away our hesitation to boldly claim your promise of abundant life. Spark new energy into frozen dreams and hearts.

Spirit of Hope—unravel our cocoons of despair and give us wings with which to fly. Be present in the dark night of the soul.

Spirit of Courage—overcome the fears and indifference that drown out your call. Inspire our hearts with the will to follow where you lead.

Spirit of Love—dispel all hatred, fear, and self-loathing. Burn brightly in the centre of all that we think and do.

Spirit of Wisdom—equip us with insight; open our minds and hearts to hear you in the unexpected. Teach us to listen with open and discerning minds.

Spirit of Healing—bind up the broken, renew the exhausted, and give strength in times of uncertainty. Be present to those we name before you now in a moment of quiet...

Spirit of Peace—quiet our fretfulness and anoint us with your gift of peace that passes all understanding.

O God may the dance of your Spirit call us to be in partnership with you, moving together as we seek to dance your hope, justice and love in all that we do.

Our Mother and our Father...

## **Jerusalema Dance Challenge**

### **Benediction**

As poet Rainer Maria Rilke said,

“That designing Spirit,



the mastermind of all things on earth,  
loves nothing so much in the sweeping movement of the dance  
as the turning point.”

The Day of Pentecost is a turning point for the church – both then and now!  
The Spirit lives in us and still calls us to boldness and brilliance,  
to be filled with hope and love and joy,  
and to dance with the rhythm of that Spirit.  
May it be so in us and in all the church!

And may the Loving God,  
Risen Christ,  
and Dancing Spirit  
fill you with all you need  
for the days ahead.

And all God’s people said,  
**“Amen!”**