

Pentecost sermon
St. Dunstan's June 9, 2019

Territorial Acknowledgement Unceded Sto:lo Territory: Katzie, Kwantlen, Mastqui

Pentecost is in some ways the birthday of the church.

All around us we hear stories about how the church is growing old or dying. So how great join you on this day from S+C a new church, from a church-plant, a church taking root and growing here in local soil.

Salal + Cedar doesn't have a building. Yesterday we worshipped on Burnaby mountain, in the summer we are taking young people to do farming and camping in the interior. And in all that we do we ask the question and try to live out the answer, what does it mean to live faithfully at a time of climate crisis.

And that windy, fiery story about the coming of the holy spirit from the book of Acts actually has a whole lot of images and ideas that resonate with our current situation.

"when the day of Pentecost had come, they were altogether in one place..."

For Christians, Pentecost is a celebration of what happened next in Acts

for Jews Pentecost or Shavuot was and is something different, festival 50 days after the Passover. To celebrate grain harvest and giving of the law, the torah

the festival description includes instructions that harvesters should not cut all the way to the edges of the field, not pick up bundles that are dropped but leave them for those who experience food scarcity.

So this festival of abundance that includes the obligation us to justice in connection with the land is the back ground to today's reading.

Breath (based on the work of Ragan Sutterfield)

Then there is wind! In both Hebrew and Greek, wind and spirit are the same word. Disciples were gathered for a festival of word and wheat, the harvest of plants grown from soil--breathing carbon, exhaling oxygen. Those plants gone to seed, passing on their life to another

season's crop and in their abundance there was a harvest of bread for planters and gleaners and seed for birds and field mice and the life upon life that lives close to the ground. It was at a festival for all these interactions, joined with a celebration of the coming of the Torah, the story of a God who breathed life to soil.

Into that festival that God sent the Holy Breath, the person of God in gaseous form. The world had lived from its first days from respiration, God like a bellows breathing into it all. Psalm 104 says:

*You send forth your Spirit [Breath], and they are created;
and so you renew the face of the earth. (v.31, NRSV)*

All of those exchanges of gas, the plants trading carbon dioxide and oxygen with animals, the anaerobic processes beneath the mud releasing methane, all were involved in a greater exchange with the God who made all and breathed all into life.

We call our age the Anthropocene, because of the impact of the human impact on earth. Forces our industry or automobiles or flying have breathed a breath that means not life, but death for the world. We call this breath "carbon", but it is simply the breath of living beyond our limits.

It is into this world of deathly exhalations that the Holy Breath comes.

Fires

And fire! Our fire today and the fire of Pentecost echoes other biblical fires.

God speaks to Moses from a burning bush

God guides the Hebrew slaves with a pillar of fire

Animal offerings are burnt on altars

The image of YHWH in a fiery chariot is borrowed from the Egyptian sun god
Prophets call down fire from heaven as a show of God's power

God is imagined as a refining fire

On the road to Emmaus the disciples say: Were not our hearts burning within us?

The risen Jesus cooks fish on a fire.

Fire brightens, warms, purifies, it is a powerful sign of God's presence
But fire can be powerfully destructive
this Anthropocene morning, the Alberta wildfire website reports 14
fires, the 5 that are burning out of control totaling over half a million
hectares or 5000 square km

And we know that fire and air are connected.
I can still remember the wonder of that early experiment of a candle in a
jar, my astonishment that the flame had been feeding on something
invisible

We are part of that equation We are now in our third year in a row of
summer skies turned dark and red by forest fires.

In Edmonton on May 31 the air quality for reached a peak of 72 on a
scale of 1 to 10.

It takes the breath away

Language

*Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on
each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to
speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.*

I used to think this verse said—fire, like tongues. But it really does not.
It says tongues as of fire, and a tongue on each one of them.
This short passage contains the Greek words: speechmaking, tongues,
languages, idiom, dialect, native language...

natural elements are important but this passage it is mostly about
language.

So what does this mean to Salal + Cedar? BC has 60% of Indigenous
languages in Canada—32 languages and 59 dialects.
But only 5% of FN people are fluent in their language, and half of those
are over the age of 65. The best off languages are described by linguists
as “severely endangered” with fewer than 1000 speakers.

Knowing our history, knowing how our church came to this place means knowing that church-run Residential Schools played a major part in the destruction of Native languages in Canada.

It also means knowing that Prayer books, psalters and hymn books produced by those same churches as tools of conversion are sometimes resources in the preservation of languages.

I recently heard a young Tahltan man, member of the Klabona Keepers – protecting the “Sacred Headwaters” Skeena, Nass and Stikine, from coalbed methane exploration (nearly 400 km north of Prince Rupert) talk about how land and language. He said when he asks his grandfather how he is doing? The answer that he would translate as “I’m fine, I’m happy” now that he is learning his language (Na-Dene or Northern Athabaskan) he realizes it means – “it is beautiful in the landscape of my mind”

The idea that a person’s interior landscape and the health of traditional territory are profoundly connected, well being of people is connected to wellbeing of land
Is central to what we do at Salal + Cedar.

Hope

We live in the Anthropocene, in the time of climate crisis, mass extinction, *“fires and smoky mist”*

But we live and act with hope and resistance and persistence

each one heard them speaking in the native language of each

when the Spirit speaks, each person hears in the words that they know from birth

The miracle of Pentecost is not that persons from all the known world and language groups could understand a crowd of Galilean hillbillies, but that each person heard and understood God’s deeds of power in vocabulary, expressions, and grammar that had meaning for them.

This event, like the prophecy from Joel that Peter quotes, is an incredible affirmation of diversity and inclusion: "*I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old shall dream dreams.* (Acts 2:17-18).

I see Joel and Luke's vision enacted in this lower Fraser watershed in the life of our diocese and in the work of Salal + Cedar

Sons and daughters prophesy, At diocesan synod—Levi Saunders a 15 yo who has participated S+C's summer camp, Put forward a resolution to help us reduce our carbon emissions, to help us return balance to that distorted exchange of breath.

After today's passage, Acts goes on to describe the early church sharing all things in common. Luke's vision is a handful of committed, Spirit-filled, ordinary folk as seeds scattered by the Holy Wind to transform the face of empire into the face of God's Beloved Community. Not of a grand, dramatic overturning of the oppressive world-system, but of small circles of Spirited sojourners embracing a different vision in their local places of dwelling.

May we live this vision, blessed and brought alive by wind and flame and word.

Amen