

Watch this week's service on YouTube by clicking: [May 31 Worship Service Video](#)

An audio file of this week's reflection is on the church website: <https://charleswoodunited.org/media/sermons/>

Church School – Rosalie Finch and Laura Rousseau are holding weekly live Cool School on Zoom each Sunday at 10:00 am. If you would like to join or are not receiving our children and youth emails please contact Laura at lrousseau@charleswood.org to be added.

Prelude

Carla and Brendan share a favorite of theirs and ours: [Enter His Gates/This is the Day](#)

Dear Friends

On the Christian calendar this Sunday is Pentecost, the day that our attention is drawn to the story in Acts chapter 2 about the gift of the Holy Spirit. Those familiar with the stained glass windows in the sanctuary of Charleswood United Church may call to mind the seventh or southernmost window. It is our Pentecost window. The Pentecost window becomes the focus of our attention until such time as we return to the Advent window at the end of November.

The artist who created the window was wise to try and not summarize the Holy Spirit in pictures but rather chose to leave much to our imaginations. The window draws inspiration from the biblical description of the Holy Spirit descending like flames. The red flames in the window reach out much in the way the Spirit reaches out to warm our hearts and touch the world that God so loves.

Worship today takes its inspiration from this wondrous and mysterious story in Acts 2. We are going to explore the ways in which the Day of Pentecost alters and broadens the understanding that the followers of Jesus had concerning who is included in the vast expanse of God's love and attention.

Opening Hymn

Join the hymn "I Feel the Winds of God Today" by clicking here: [I Feel the Winds of God Today](#)

Bible Reading

The Gospel Lesson for May 31 can be read it by clicking here: [Acts 2:1-21](#)

Reflection

I am relieved when reading the story of Pentecost in Acts chapter 2 when I come to verse 12. Acts 2:12 says, "They were amazed and perplexed." I don't think we are reading this story properly if we are not amazed and perplexed by what is described and what is meant by the 'pouring out of the Holy Spirit on all humankind'.

The story describes an amazing diversity of people gathered together in Jerusalem. They are in the company of the followers of Jesus. The Spirit descends upon them and it says that each and every person gathered heard one another "in their own language". They were being formed as a new community. And the diversity that is described is broad and miraculous.

I don't know how exactly to describe it in contemporary terms but maybe it is what you would hear if you were present in the General Assembly of the United Nations. Maybe it was something like what you would experience in the athlete's village at an Olympic Games. Maybe it sounded something like the streets of one of the capital cities of the world like London or New York, Tokyo or Jerusalem. What we are told in Acts 2 is that among those who were amazed and perplexed were people from what you and I would call modern day Iran. There were people from ancient Mesopotamia or what we today refer to as Iraq. There were people from the old and broad understanding of Asia. There were people of Arabia, however that was understood 2000 years ago. It says there were people from North Africa, from Egypt and Libya. People from Mediterranean islands like Crete. There were even people from far off Rome. That list is meant to a representation of the whole world, as it would have been understood in Jerusalem of the first century.

A deeper reading of Acts 2 shows us it is even more mysterious than that. Included in the list are Elamites. Historians tell us that Elamites, their culture and their language, disappear from history in the 7th century BC. Pentecost is describing God's creative attention not only across a broad spectrum of space, but across time itself. No wonder they were amazed and perplexed!

Dale Martin of Yale University has taught that we might better understand the nature of God's love and care for creation by recalling the Doctrine of Divine Simplicity. Martin asks if we truly believe the most basic, fundamental, essential things about God and asks us to consider what that means for our living. For example, do we believe that God is Good, goodness itself? Do we believe that God is One, pure essence and indivisible? Do we believe that God is Love, such love as would not exist if it were not for God? If we take to heart these simple truths about God and hold that God is Good, One, and Love then does it not follow that there is only one direction that our understanding of God's care can flow. God's love and concern must only add and never subtracts. It only grows and never shrinks. It only expands and never contracts. It only increases and never decreases. It only includes and never, ever excludes.

We give thanks for this understanding for it helps shape who we are as people blessed with the Holy Spirit. And it serves to remind us that if we seek to be a new people upon whom God's Spirit has been poured out, then some things we have held onto have to give way. I believe that as we add, as we increase, as we expand, as we include who it is we believe God loves, then the thing we have to give up is the right to blame others. We have to give up blaming the poor, or racial minorities, or New Canadians, or refugees, or the other gender, or sexual minorities. We have to add these to our understanding. We have to include them. We have to increase our understanding of who it is God intends to love when we read in scripture that the Spirit is poured out on all humankind.

We are living in a time when the Spirit's presence, the Spirit's expansive ways are being made known to us. In this pandemic there is no one we can leave behind. There is no one we can exclude. There is no one who doesn't matter. Across nations, across ages, across cultures, across languages compassion is being poured out on all humankind much in the way the Spirit was poured out on the day of Pentecost.

It is Peter who stands up that day 2000 years ago in Jerusalem, and interprets what it was all those who were amazed and perplexed were experiencing. This is what was promised, the last days, the age of the Spirit, poured out on all humankind. For that we give thanks. And we relish the opportunity to live in this world that God has made. Amen.

Hymn

View and enjoy the More Voices hymn "Spirit God, Be Our Breath" by clicking here: [Spirit God, Be Our Breath](#)

Prayers

We thank you Holy and Generous Spirit, that as on the day of Pentecost your people have come to a common moment to give thanks and praise for the blessings you shower upon us. We come from different neighbourhoods, different families, different experiences but in the community of faith we are one people, united by grace, and committed to serve.

As on the day of Pentecost we speak in many languages. Some of us speak the language of great need, some the language of sorrow. Some of us can speak only the language of our own class. Some cannot find the words to express the horror they have experienced. Let your Spirit descend upon us that we may come to understand what our neighbours are saying to us.

As on the day of Pentecost, we gather with an awareness of the multitude of nations from which your people come. When the Spirit came upon that gathering, divisions and prejudices and superiority was lost in the flame. Let us not hold to the advantage of our land nor to the power of wealth, but bless us with the wisdom to look upon the nations of the world as agents for the common good.

As on the day of Pentecost we know that there will be some who look upon the church with confusion or disdain. Let us not be deterred for the work to which you call us, life and worship with a common purpose that peace, forgiveness, and love will pour out on all creation.

As on the day of Pentecost a new era began, let there be a new day dawning in which the sorrow and isolation, the fear and anxiety of this pandemic is behind us.

As on the day of Pentecost, pour out your Spirit upon us Holy One. Let us see visions and dream dreams of the ministry you desire from us. Keep your church alive with joy and thanksgiving for the mission you give us. These things we ask in the name of the One whose gifts are made alive by the dawning of the Spirit, Jesus Christ, who calls the church to pray together by saying.... Our Father.....

Be well, be safe, be hopeful.

Michael

Postlude

Listen to Faith Based in a contemporary version of Amazing Grace by clicking here: [Amazing Grace/My Chains Are Gone](#)