

St. Paul's Halifax  
Pentecost Sunday – May 27, 2007

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**“WE ARE NOT ALONE”**

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*O Lord, help us to become masters of ourselves  
That we might not become the servants of others,  
Take our minds and think through them,  
Take our hands and work through them,  
Take our hearts and set them on fire,  
For Jesus' sake.*

What precedes the arrival of the Holy Spirit is rather mundane.

The choosing of Matthias:

- Acts 1 – throwing of dice to see who'll be the next disciple
- Never hear of Matthias again.

An event is bigger than the details – walking on the moon, Nelson Mandela walking out of Robben Island prison and not seeking revenge.

The coming of the Holy Spirit will change the world forever.

- 1. The invisible becomes visible – the Holy Spirit comes in an extraordinary new way fulfilling prophecy and bearing witness to the Gospel.**

“I will pour out my spirit on all flesh.”

People of one ethnicity speaking all the languages of the world. To speak in someone's language is the most intimate act of communication.

- 2. God's message is for everyone.**

The event is even bigger than the details. How the message is delivered adds meaning to the message. The Gospel is for everyone. And God chooses to use every language to communicate the truth.

Right from the beginning (in Acts 2) it was to be a church of all people

- inclusiveness

- grew quickly
- a relevant theme for us: When the gospel loses its diversity, it loses power.

Inclusiveness – breaks down the natural tribalism that drives people apart

And we live in a world that needs this message:

- rich vs poor -- The growing gap
  - 3 billion people -- less than \$2/day.
  - 29,000 children die each day of hunger and preventable causes. (1,200 every hour; 20 every minute; one every three seconds.... A tsunami of deaths every 10 days)
  - High-income countries control about 80% of the world's GDP
- educated vs uneducated
- discriminatory treatment – I think of the treatment of aboriginals and the poor in Canada.
  - 1 in 6 Canadian kids are living in poverty – that's 1.2 million children who live in insecure and poor housing, unsafe neighbourhoods, facing hunger, poorer health and exclusion from community life.
  - Treatment of our immigrants: educated people driving cabs, sweeping floors.

**It takes two miracles (Acts 2 and later Peter's dream in Acts 10) before the disciples fully understand God's plan for diversity and inclusiveness in his church.**

God's love was not restricted to only a certain group of people. The most powerful thing is that the message of God's love went international. Galatians 3:28 -- "There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus."

In Canada, we have incredible opportunities not only to share the Gospel in many languages, but also to ensure that people of other ethnicities are included in our churches and communities in every way possible. These ethnicity barriers are something that we need to battle at every level. It requires us to get out of our comfort zones and move with the Spirit.

### **3. God will work through people – you and me.**

God's work involves language.

Not only does the Spirit enable us to do incredible acts of sharing our faith through words of witness, but also through actions of compassion.

How did the power of the Holy Spirit affect the physical life of people? After Pentecost, the disciples saw so many needs of the poor, realized the leaders couldn't do everything, so they set up a committee. They made special

arrangements to look after the poor, the widows, the orphans, the disadvantaged. There were wonders and miracles, they sold their possessions, gave to whoever had a need, shared everything in common (Acts 2:42-46). There were healings in Peter's ministry in Acts. They lived it out radically and pooled their money so all could benefit. There was prophesying – a concern for the future.

When the power of the Holy Spirit came, it came to fulfill the Gospel Jesus came to preach. When Jesus preached in the Synagogue (Luke 4), he said: "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour."

In my work, I meet incredible people of faith who are making a difference in living out the Gospel.

### **Paulina**

I recently met a woman named Paulina in Tanzania. She lives out the gospel and follows the Holy Spirit by caring for her two granddaughters in incredibly difficult circumstances. Many elderly women in sub-Saharan Africa take care of their grandchildren who've been orphaned by AIDS. All of them struggle to feed and clothe the children.

But Paulina has leprosy. Most of her fingers and all of her toes are gone, and she's lost the sight in one eye. She lives in a village of lepers where, to get by, she depends on her neighbours, and begs once a week in a nearby town where she might make 75 cents.

In spite of her hardships, her faith is strong. "I pray that God will take care of the girls," she told me. "As they grow, God will help them."

Before we left their crumbling little home, we asked if we could pray for Paulina and her granddaughters. "No," she insisted. "Please – let me pray for you."

Here's a woman -- probably the most discriminated kind of person in all her country -- no husband, no education, leper, poor, bottom of society – living out the Gospel, loving her grandchildren and following the Spirit's leading.

The great missionary doctor, **Albert Schweitzer**, spoke to graduates at a school in England. He said, "I do not know what your destiny will be. Some of you will perhaps occupy remarkable positions. But I know one thing. The only ones among you who will be really happy are those who have sought and found how to serve."

Everyone has something to give. No one's too rich to receive or too poor to give.

#### **4. We're not in this alone. God's power is with us.**

In the story of Babel, God uses language to accomplish his purposes. The story of the tower of Babel is a reminder that we won't find our way through life without God. It's a dead end.

In contrast, in the Gospel passage from John 14, Jesus says – "...all who have faith in me will do the works I have been doing, and they will do even greater things than these..."(v. 12). Yet in Acts 2, God uses different languages to spread the Gospel. A judgment in Genesis becomes an opportunity in Acts. 2.

He promises his disciples that if we believe and commit ourselves to this new reality, God will allow us to do things we've never thought possible. How? Later in that chapter, Jesus tells them it's because he's sending the Holy Spirit.

Jesus encourages his followers to do the ministry that he's called them to do. The devil doesn't need us to think smaller. Here's a wonderful reminder of the power we have to live out the Holy Spirit's power – the power we read about in Acts.

I was in South India last December. It was 7:30 on a Thursday night. We walked into a dimly lit church, there was no electricity. Inside there were about 120 children seated on the floor: ages 7 to 14 or 15. Boys on one side, girls on the other.

There was a prayer wheel in the centre divided into 4 quadrants: our world, our country, our community, our family.

The children knelt down, and each began praying. It was a powerful experience. One child got up and said they had prayed that their dad would stop beating their mother, and that this week it had been better. One boy got up and said he had asked God to help him work harder in school, and God had helped him.

It was a powerful experience.

They earnestly thanked God for blessing them, and invited God to be part of the solution in their homes and communities.

What I learned later – many of these children were from Hindu homes. But the WV workers have invited them to come and pray in Jesus' name. Through the work of these dedicated staff people, 100 families have come to faith in Jesus.

Ephesians 2:10 says: "For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do." God's handiwork – part of being the new creation.

Let me close this morning with a story:

In my travels in Africa, I met an incredible, inspiring woman, who I'll call

Anna. Anna is HIV-positive (like almost all women, she probably contracted it from her partner). But she is on a one-woman crusade to educate young people about HIV/AIDS. The infection rate in her area is high, and many people, especially teenagers, just don't know how HIV/AIDS is spread.

Anna is determined that, in the midst of that chaos, her life is going to count for something. Her life expectancy is short and she faces poverty and struggles you and I can't even imagine. But in the midst of that chaos and poverty, Anna had the courage to say to me: "The first thing I had to learn is that I'm not dead yet. Like all of us I'm just a passerby in this life, but God has a plan for me while I'm still breathing."

Anna goes house to house in her community, giving advice on how to prevent the infection of others, improving the diet of the family in simple ways and sharing stories of hope from the Bible.

In the midst of the chaos of her life, Anna had learned something about the Holy Spirit's power. That no matter how insignificant or weak we are, the Holy Spirit can work through us to accomplish what God desires, to bring about the Kingdom.

The Holy Spirit has come to us in a way that has changed the world forever. God chooses to work through us by using the power of the Holy Spirit. We are not alone!

Praise the Lord!