

## **2022 06 12 – Dancing with the Spirit**

**Proverbs 8:1-4, 22-31**

**John 16:12-15** (The Inclusive Bible)

We have now officially entered the Season Following Pentecost. This is a season when we focus on the work of the Spirit in our lives and in the church and in the world. Pentecost celebrates the birth of the Christian church, the day when the Spirit came to those first apostles in wind and fire and gave them the strength and the courage to spread Jesus' message throughout the world as they knew it.

It was very appropriate that last Sunday, on the day of Pentecost, our UCW celebrated their 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary with a special service. This is also the time of year that we remember the birthday of The United Church of Canada. It was 97 years ago, on June 10<sup>th</sup>, 1925 that the United Church officially came into being at a massive church service in a hockey arena in downtown Toronto. Just imagine the Spirit (the wind and fire) dancing through all of those beginnings, those anniversaries, those celebrations.

In today's reading from Proverbs we hear Wisdom calling us, telling us that she was also part of a beginning, a birthing—the creation of the world itself. She says, "I was the skilled artisan standing next to the Almighty. I was God's delight day after day, rejoicing at being in God's presence continually, rejoicing in the whole world and delighting in humankind." In Hebrew the word for Wisdom is Hokhmah, and in Greek it is Sophia. It is a feminine word and is also used interchangeably with Spirit or Holy Spirit. In fact in Genesis Chapter 1 we read, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. But earth became

chaos and emptiness, and darkness came over the face of the Deep—yet the Spirit of God was brooding over the surface of the waters.” The Spirit of God, Sophia, Hokmah, Wisdom was there dancing at the moment of creation.

On a beautiful spring day, like today, it is easy to appreciate, to marvel at the skill of the artisan who created this world in which we live. It is easy to imagine the breath of God flowing over the chaos and the darkness in those acts of creation. It is easy to imagine the Spirit still flowing through the trees, the flowers and the fields that surround us. It is easy to imagine the Spirit present in the birds and the butterflies, the fox and the coyote, the deer and the antelope. It is easy to imagine the Spirit present in flowing streams, the endless skies and the vast prairies. What a gift it is to be in this place, in this moment, revelling in God’s creation! Let us all just take a moment and breathe. Let us take a moment and allow the Spirit to dance around and within us.

But life is not always this beautiful, or this easy. I sometimes think about what it was like in the 20-30 years leading up to the creation of The United Church of Canada. I would like to have been a fly on the wall of some of those meetings where representatives from The Methodist, Presbyterian and Congregationalist churches got together to talk about doctrine, polity and practice for this new church that they were creating. How did they take all their differing points of view and come up with one Basis of Union? How well was this change accepted in their individual churches? We know it wasn’t easy. In fact, there was a part of the Presbyterian Church that chose not to be included. Birthing does not happen without pain. Change does not happen without struggle. New life comes from

death. This has been true since the beginning of time and was certainly true for those first followers of Jesus.

In today's scripture reading from the Gospel of John, Jesus is speaking to his disciples just before his death. He is preparing his disciples for that time when he will no longer be with them. He begins by saying, "I have much more to tell you, but you can't bear to hear it now. When the Spirit of truth comes, she will guide you into all truth."

"You can't bear to hear it now." There is some grace in the fact that we don't know everything that is going to happen. As much as we might want to know, as much as we might want to anticipate or to even control what will happen in our lives, the reality is that much of life is beyond our knowledge and beyond our control. And so all we can do is listen and be ready when the Spirit calls.

For Jesus' disciples, that meant responding to the Spirit's call at the time of Pentecost. It meant leaving what they knew and travelling throughout the Mediterranean to spread the good news of God's love. It meant facing hardship, struggle, even prison and death. But it also meant the creation of small house churches in towns and cities throughout the known world. It meant the spreading of Jesus' message of faith and hope, of love, peace and justice. It meant the building of the Christian church.

Like those early followers of Jesus, like our forefathers and foremothers in The United Church of Canada, we are living in a time of death and re-creation. We

see the evidence in our churches, in our social and political systems and in creation itself: the dwindling numbers in our pews, the huge chasms dividing the political left and right and the ravages of climate change. We are at a crossroads, a time of great tumult, and that same Holy Spirit, Sophia, the Spirit of Truth and Wisdom is dancing with us still.

So how do we hear and respond to that Spirit? I believe this is a good start. For many us, the presence of the Spirit is easier to know and to hear when we move out into the natural world. We are coming up to summer, a quieter time in the church, a season of rest and relaxation, an opportunity for listening and contemplation. As you take time in God's creation over the next couple of months, I invite to you glory in the work of the artisan and to listen for the call of Wisdom, the Spirit of Truth. Listen for where the Spirit is leading you in your life and listen for where the Spirit is leading the church.

Yes, our Church Council is already actively wondering and listening to where the Spirit might be leading us. But we know that new ideas, new ministries, new opportunities can come from any and all members of this congregation. We already have Linda Stumpf to thank for our Creation Station, Rose Lis to thank for our Living Wall and Charles Lotochinski to thank for coming up with the idea of becoming an Affirming Ministry. Every new ministry begins with one person's Spirit-filled idea. One of the things that our Church Council is working on is being open to new ideas. If the Spirit has already been active in your heart and mind, if you already have a new idea, please let us know. And may we all continue to dance with Sophia, the Spirit of Truth!