

God Remembers
Acts 2:1-21
Pentecost
Sermon by Rev. Jessica McCrae
30 May 2021.

When was the last time you caught your breath and held it, out of fear or apprehension, straining to hear some sound that might serve as a clue to what might come next? I remember that exact feeling huddled in the basement of my manse (the house that churches used to have for ministers to live in), shortly after my ordination, as an F1 tornado slammed into the house pulling off some shingles, taking out some bricks and knocking over trees. I had known there was a tornado headed down from Stratford, right for me, when the power went out and I lost my television connection. Before the days of twitter and smart phones that then meant I had to rely on my common sense and my view of the sky. I knew we were in trouble when the sky turned a sickening yellow green and dime sized hail began to fall. It sounded like a gravel truck dumped its load on my house.

Grabbing my cat I ran for the cellar and stayed there. Breath held, straining to hear what would come next. There was some racket, some wind, and then everything was deadly quiet. Eventually

when I figured the coast had to be clear, I took a deep breath, enough to regain my bearings and I headed upstairs to see what happened.

The first thing I saw were some huge pine trees laying in my yard, the second thing was a neighbour who lived in the subdivision across the field from me. She was running toward me with her baby and the two of them crushed into me for a hug. Obviously at least as shaken as me, needing some comfort. There we were, the three of us, happy to be ok, total strangers, taking a deep life giving breath together.

I think it was kind of like that for Jesus friends, too.

Today, we are celebrating the festival of Pentecost, that time in the church when the first followers of Jesus remember to take that deep gasping live giving breath – that eventually gives life to the church and meaning to their lives. You have to remember that for the disciples life has been anything but ordinary lately. Their friend and teacher Jesus was betrayed by another friend, sentenced and executed in the most torturous of ways. And then, as if that wasn't enough, there were experiences and stories of resurrection – Jesus living and teaching in some form even after his death.

But it had been awhile now since his friends had seen Jesus resurrected or otherwise. Everything had been pretty quiet – people

said that he must have ascended – gone to heaven – one thing was sure, he had not been around these parts for awhile. It was deathly quiet. The calm before the storm so to speak. And in that silence his friends are still straining to hear some whisper of him when chaos unfolds – wind and fire and all manner of crazy and frenzied behaviour in the room. But this isn't your regular thunderstorm, and this is not normal human behaviour; Jesus friends' realize they have been living in that tension between the proverbial lightning strike and the living of life; holding their breath out of fear and apprehension.

But then the wind comes, an event we call Pentecost, and they finally inhale again, filling their lungs not just with life giving oxygen, but with the life giving energy of the Holy Spirit, that “stuff” that makes this storm different from all others, the stuff that makes them community, that makes them want to get out of bed in the morning and into the world to care for one another and walk with one another and cry with one another and stand tall with one another. It is that stuff that begins to swirl in their hearts that makes them want to know their neighbours names, and know their neighbours stories; it makes them want to stand up and take notice.

Pentecost is the birth of the church, it is the birth of Christianity as we know it, or maybe more appropriately, Christianity as it should be. I like to think that Pentecost is the day that God took notice of the need occurring among God's people and for lack of a better analogy, – God stood up and gave us the tools we need to survive.

And we need Pentecost today. As we continue in our second year in pandemic, as we wonder what the future will hold, as we see people suffering and dying and losing their businesses, as addictions increase and fear tightens its hold on us. As frustrations grow and loneliness sometimes feels overwhelming. As we miss our family and our friends. As we grieve for all we have lost

Pentecost happens.

Pentecost, God's answer to our frustration and our grief, God's bold statement that despite the fact we might feel that God doesn't care, that we might not always get the answers we want or need in the ways that make sense to us, despite the fact that some days we feel that God must have left us too because we hurt so much and feel so broken, and have messed up so badly ... we have not been forgotten. Despite all of the chaos that may be unfolding around us,

God still knows we're here; we have not been lost in the rubble, overlooked or kicked to the curb; God is aware and God remembers.

That is what Pentecost is all about; academic theologians will tell you that Pentecost is the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, the completion of the Trinitarian Godhead. But that kind of language doesn't mean too much to most people who come to church looking for comfort. I learned that 20 years ago last week, the day I was ordained, the day I had to go out into the world and try to help my congregations make sense of a God that I soon found I often didn't understand, a God that some days I even struggled to find. A lot has happened in the world since that day in 2001 when I was ordained. A lot has happened. Our world has been stretched and hurt in ways that we never, on May 27, 2001 imagined was possible. All it takes is a morning like September 11, 2001 to feel like God has forgotten us, or the death of one we loved or a diagnosis of a scary and towering disease, to feel that God has forgotten. Pandemics, earthquakes, wars, the desperation of migrants and refugees, devastating forest fires in Alberta and Australia, economic collapse, tsunamis ... with all that has happened it can sometimes be easy to wonder if God was somehow swept away in the devastation of it all too. But then, out of

the blue, sometimes like the rush of a powerful wind, sometimes as gently as a neighbour's hand on your shoulder, Pentecost comes into your life, like it came into the lives of Jesus' friends that day in Jerusalem 2000 some odd years ago, and you know, that despite what comes next, despite where the road leads, how the story unfolds, comes what may you know you are not forgotten.

Hopefully you experience that, hopefully you know that when you come here and gather in this community – even while we do it virtually. Because that is why church exists. Because for whatever reason, God doesn't do this alone but seeks instead to work that energy and love out into the world through the hearts and hands and hope of our neighbours. If you haven't experienced that yet don't worry, you will get the hang of it. You will learn to let your guard down a little, put anger on hold for a moment, make yourself a tiny bit vulnerable, and when you do you will leave this time together, this community, feeling like you have had an infusion of spiritual chemotherapy, some kind treatment that breaks down the apprehension and hurt a little bit at a time and makes room for more trust, more concern for others, more hope in the future.

That is what happens, when we share this little meal together of bread and juice, not enough to fill any tummy, but when you make room for the mystery, make room for Pentecost, that bread and cup become a feast. It happens when you realize that when you lift that bread and cup to your mouth, God is with you – to support you in your pain and your stress and your anger and your apprehension. And when you realize that, somehow in all of the frustrating mystery that is our relationship with God, this bread and juice become a reminder not only of the love and energy that is in this scattered virtual church community of ours, but of the love and energy that is God, that will send us out into the world and support us through our week until we can come together again and fill up on more.

That is what Pentecost is all about.

Forget the theological language about trinity and godhead, put aside trying to figure out how the story told in our scripture reading really could have happened exactly as it has been remembered, but remember this – Pentecost, today is the day God stood up and said in a loud clear voice – I know you are there; you are not forgotten.

Amen.