

### ***Where the Spirit Goes, Look Out!***

A sermon shared with the congregation of St. Andrew's United Church

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by Rev. Dave Le Grand

Nikos Kazantzakis, an author you may know from his critically acclaimed novel "The Last Temptation of Christ", writes poetically about a great, mysterious, Cry:

Blowing through heaven and earth,  
and in the heart of every living thing,  
is a gigantic breath - a great Cry - which we call God.  
Plant life wished to continue its motionless sleep  
next to stagnant waters,  
but the Cry leaped up within it and violently shook its roots:  
"Away, let go of earth, walk!"

Had the tree been able to think and judge, it would have cried:  
"I don't want to. What are you urging me to do?  
You are demanding the impossible!"

But the Cry, without pity, kept shaking its roots and shouting,  
"Away, let go of the earth, walk!"

It shouted in this way for thousands of eons;  
and lo! as a result of desire and struggle,  
life escaped the motionless tree and was liberated.

Animals appear - worms - making themselves  
at home in water and mud.

"We're just fine here," they said.

"We have peace and security; we're not budging!"

But the terrible Cry hammered itself pitilessly into their loins.

"Leave the mud, stand up, give birth to your betters!"

"We don't want to! We can't!"

"You can't, but I can. Stand up!"

And lo! After thousands of eons, humans emerged,  
trembling on their still unsolid legs...

... Humanity calls in despair,

"Where can I go?

I have reached the pinnacle, beyond is the abyss."

And the Cry answers,

"I am beyond. Stand up!"

Gale force winds... Fire. The mystery at the heart of the Pentecost story was anticipated by the followers of Jesus; he told his friends before he left them, and I paraphrase, "Wait for something to come." I'm certain that his faithful circle could not have anticipated this Pentecost moment. How could they, or anyone, imagine the unharnessed Spirit symbolized by wind and fire.

We enjoyed a fire last night right here – here, flames danced and popped high into the air as tall tales were told. Children and adults marvelled at the stars in a clear night while firelight cast shadows around us. I watched the fire and the wonderful mysterious events around me through the lens of this Bible Pentecost story. I connected with those moments in my life when I, like those stunned onlookers in the Bible stories, wondered, “What on earth is going on here?”

Can you think of moments in your life where the Spirit took hold? Can you remember moments where things shifted suddenly, mysteriously? The mood at a gathering is profoundly impacted by the sharing of a poignant story. Or maybe things at one point in your life seemed hopeless, but, something happened or a person strangely had an revelation that helped resolve the situation.

Spirit can be unnervingly spontaneous. In this Bible story, Spirit triggered a sense of connection among the masses of people there. Imagine: Strangers sharing for a moment a radical sense of unity as they collectively behold the mystery. These were witnesses who would have otherwise walked by, but the Spirit’s movement, some from foreign lands are hearing their language spoken.

“How it is that this fisherperson, or that farmer, speaks my language?!”

As the Spirit danced like fire, the air stirred up like wind, something changed there – changed Jesus’ followers.

The friends of Jesus were left waiting in Jerusalem, grieving their friend’s death but asked to wait expectantly. We can relate, can’t we? We, too, have spent the last couple of months waiting at home,<sup>1</sup> in uncertainty, but holding onto a distant hope that some day we will physically connect again.

At Pentecost, Holy Mystery hovers in the air, breathes peace and unity onto onlookers. But there were cynics. There always are cynics and skeptics in the face of mystery. Some of us are skeptics – that is ok, to ask questions.

But... here I am, the morning after a fire. Seeing the ash, I remember Fire and Mystery. Encountering God’s wild Spirit, though, invites us to go deeper into the question of what we believe about our Creator and about ourselves. We might ask ourselves: What difference do Spirit-filled moments in my life make in how I live and what difference I am capable of making in my world? The fire has died down, but you and I are invited to connect with that Spirit’s power, symbolized by wind and fire, in our everyday lives.

Telling the Story of Pentecost, the birthday of Christ’s Church, each year reminds us that it wasn’t an *institution* that was born that day. It wasn’t at all a call to organize ourselves, to craft a mission statement or to develop effective academic programs to train Christian leaders. For all intents and purposes, at Pentecost the Spirit sparked an uprising of love, a holy revolution that created a unique community grounded in the stories and teachings of Jesus.

Forgive me for borrowing language from our present experience, but I suggest that, at Pentecost, Spirit triggered a holy outbreak of viral proportions. People’s lives were

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<sup>1</sup> “A Pentecost to Wait and Hope, Pray and Trust”, workingpreacher.com. Sunday, May 24, 2020. Kathryn M. Schifferdecker

changed, they were born anew in their attitudes and actions. We are invited to decide today, and then again tomorrow, and in subsequent days to open our attitudes and actions, our whole lives to be transformed. I think some of us really crave an infusion of something radical, confined to our homes. What attitudes or lifestyle choices in your life need to be opened up to wind and fire, a spiritual spring cleaning?

When our opinions, behaviours, become entrenched because they are embedded in our routines – change is not easy. Especially in our world where sounding like a know-it-all tends to be rewarded more among public figures, more at times than leaders who dare to ask questions, to wonder. I think I see Spirit moving right now around me, as I see dedicated people near and far powerfully moved by suffering so much that they organize projects to care for people who carry more heavily the burden of pandemic living. When the Spirit moves among us, we cannot fetter or manage it – it moves where it will, who it will.

Are you open to being moved when the Spirit's wind and fire falls upon your life? I hear that it will change your life. Amen.