

June 14, 2020

The Rev. Dr. Morar Murray-Hayes



Reading: Corinthians 12.4 - 13

The Message:

[Video](#)

I remember a few years ago talking about Pentecost with our youth group – I thought we could dramatise the story. I gathered the resources we needed and gathered them and the youth into my then brand new office: red and yellow and orange paper to cut into flames, a fan for the wind – no problem to get them to make lots of noise.

The girls started cutting out flame shapes, the boys went a bit squirrely, cutting paper into confetti sized bits of paper – hundreds of them.

Then, as I told the story, the girls waved their paper flames and the boys turned on the fan for the wind – which gave them an idea – if you hold small bits of paper up to a fan – well just imagine.

Hundreds of tiny pieces of paper carpeting the floor, the furniture, in every nook and cranny – and all over the girls. My office, my brand new office, my pristine, neat office was a disaster.

And then I realized, that's what the office is for. It's for people, fans, confetti, chaos. And that was what Pentecost was for too.

Pentecost was the beginning of a movement of little groups of people getting together in secret in hideaways.

But eventually, church became something other than the people: the buildings took on the name church, and churches became architectural marvels, they started to take on similar forms – there is a church in Tanzania that is an exact miniature replica of St. Paul's Cathedral in London.

And people – they started to take on the characteristics of the buildings – a sameness about them – sometimes worried more about the buildings and the rules than they were about that chaotic spirit that blew through the upper room.

But Jesus was not about starting an architectural movement. Or a movement of sameness.

Those flying bits of coloured paper challenged me to accept the chaos of difference.

The season of pentecost -- the season of the spirit -- is the longest in the church year. So it gives us time to understand how the fights of the spirit play out in the lives of individuals and in the life of the church.

I'd like to tell you about a couple of leaders in my previous church: Cally and Catherine.

Cally was raised in the Salvation Army, played the euphonium in the brass band, and was a captain as a young woman. A civil servant who guided the provincial budget for seniors' programming, as she neared retirement she became a theological student at Emmanuel College.

Catherine was Roman Catholic, orphaned very early and raised in a convent, she became a psychotherapist who worked with victims of torture, incest and other unspeakable horrors. She was a nun for 25 years.

How they came into our church:

Cally was the first to come to see me. She and Catherine had been members at Metropolitan Community Church for many years, but were finding the commute to church to be taxing. Cally had asked one of her professors if he could recommend a church in the area, and he suggested mine. Cally asked me if I thought they would be welcome. My congregation had in the past had a gay organist and a gay interim minister, both closeted, but both whose orientation was known to some.

The congregation had a very moderate response to the Membership, Ministry and Human Sexuality report of the late 80s and embarked on a 4 year educational series to understand human sexuality from a spiritual perspective.

My response to Cally was, "if not here, then I don't know where. Why don't you come and share your gifts of faith."

What they offered our church:

They began to worship, joined committees and shared their gifts. Cally taught Bible Study groups and the grade 7 and 8 Sunday program. Catherine participated in our Faith Story groups and prayer groups, and introduced us to the Roman Catholic Brother Thomas Keating's Centering Prayer which brings together eastern meditation practices with Christian spirituality.

Cally finished her studies and came on staff as our Pastoral Visitor. She was a welcome support to our seniors.

When same gender marriage became legal, they asked me to marry them and to include communion in the wedding. We prepared the service together bringing threads of our three traditions together.

Two weeks before the wedding, they decided it would be okay for me to invite members to attend.

After I announced it in church, our oldest male member greeted me with, "tell me the time of the service? I have to be there to give them my blessing. Everyone should have the love that I've shared with my Jeannie!"

They were married just short of Catherine's 70th birthday. Gay couples came up to receive communion together who had not darkened the door of a church in years. Several started attending churches in their own areas, sharing their spiritual gifts with their congregations.

I guess I'm telling this story because it's the story of a sharing of gifts. Last week I talked about how important other people are to us. That we need others and we need God. The really beautiful thing that this story represents is what happens when we accept people and their relationship with God is freed to enrich the spiritual lives of others. And when you receive the benefits of those gifts, it is a particularly great gift of God.

Last week Alan and I led worship by Zoom for The Stone Church, in Cragmoor in the Catskills of New York State. Alan, an American and a great appreciator of American music, chose the youtube videos for the music.

He included

Barack Obama singing Amazing Grace at the funeral of Senator and Pastor Clementa Pinckney, Mahalia Jackson singing “Just a Closer Walk with Thee!” in the 60s, and “She Flies on” written by Canadian Anglican Bishop Gordon Light. From three very different contexts, and yet each moved us to tears. We grow in our spirits in a way most pleasing to God when we are open to opening ourselves to receive the gifts of those who are most different from us.

Jesus is not appointing the church as his moral watchdog; it’s not about ‘you’re in and you’re out.’

Jesus gives his followers the power of the Spirit to set people free from the loneliness of turning away from God.

Jesus tells his followers that they can set people free from estrangement from God. They can be a part of seeing others come to see in Jesus the intimate love of God.

In receiving the Spirit, the church receives Jesus' own capacity to show God to the world and to receive God from unexpected places in the world.

So this season of Pentecost, comes around each year to remind us that we are given a precious gift:

Though our lives aren’t neat or tidy, though differences threaten to divide us,
God will give us ears to listen,
words to speak
actions for our hands,
and thoughts for our hearts,
that will free us to have a close relationship with God
and sustain us as we offer that freedom to others.