



**Sermon:** June 6, 2021

**Scripture Reading:** John 20.19-23

**The Message:**  
New Life from a Cracked World

[Video Version](#)



**The Rev. Dr.  
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The painting that accompanies my message I call Pentecost. It was painted by Michael Minthorn and hangs in our farm. It is quite large, much more intensely brilliant in person. It captures the symbol of fire and the Light of the World being born out of the brokenness of the world -- a world cracked by human evil. The flames in the bush in the right hand window of the Port Credit Triptych reminds us of Moses' encounter with God in the burning bush. The presence of God, the Spirit of Christ visible in the flames.

One year, I was talking about Pentecost with the youth of a previous church. It was the first week back in the building after a major extension. I loved my large brand new office.

I thought we could dramatize the story of Pentecost. I gathered the resources we needed and the youth into that 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 began cutting their coloured 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 – all over the girls, and me. My 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 is the birthday of the church – the beginning of something that was really unknown – 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 -- a lesson we have learned in this pandemic as we have learned so many ways of continuing to be the church.

John, the Gospel writer, tells the story of the coming of the Spirit differently than the writer of Acts. The disciples are afraid, yes, gathered in an upper room in secret. But Jesus appears to them:

- Jesus bestows peace upon his worried followers. Great!
- Jesus fills them with the Holy Spirit. Great!
- Jesus tells them they can release or retain other people's sins. Huh?

**‘Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive/release the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.’**

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

In the Gospel of John, sin in John is not about moral failing. Jesus talks about sin as being estranged from God – and gives his followers the power of the Spirit to set people free from the loneliness of turning away from God.

## **Part 2**

This week we have learned what has long been suspected by the parents of children in residential schools. Children died. Think about your elementary school. Did your school have a burial ground attached? The Honourable Murray Sinclair spoke to our church’s Regional Council on the day that the discoveries of 215 little bodies at Kamloops Indian Residential School in British Columbia that only closed in 1978.

His Honour told us that even when we scan every residential school property in the country, the number of deaths will be underestimated. There were the children who escaped and died trying to get home; there were children who were sent home when they contracted tuberculosis, dying at home and infecting whole communities. We learned that boys enlisted in the armed forces in order to get out of residential schools and that more children died in the schools than at war.

‘They didn’t know what they were doing,’ might be what we say. We know that teachers -- often women missionaries -- wrote letters and sought justice for the children in their care and I know of women whose lives were destroyed by even a brief time teaching in a residential school. So some knew that this was wrong.

What we do know is that what people in governments and churches **did** estranged them from God.

Our Outreach Committee has recognized that it is not enough for us to feel bad, horrified even. Our only choice is to act. So the Outreach Committee have begun to study and pray and listen in the coming year to give you the opportunity to act in ways that bring us all out of estrangement.

In them, I see that yellow flame being lit. Out of our cracked world God’s light will shine. The Spirit of Christ will be known in our actions.

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. We have the opportunity to see in Jesus the possibilities of redemption for our country and to show God’s Spirit, finally, to the world.

This terrible discovery has given us the opportunity to right wrongs. Pentecost, fifty days after Easter, comes around each year to remind us that we are given a precious gift:

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