



## CHRIST CHURCH CRANBROOK

God is a Surprise\_ - The Day of Pentecost- 6\_5\_2022

I speak to you today as a sinner to sinners, as the beloved of God to God's beloved, as one called to bear witness to those called the bear witness. Amen.

Please be seated for a brief blessed little thought. And I want to begin by apologizing to you all that I somehow missed the choir's response after Let Us Pray, but I was following the praises booklet and for reasons that I don't understand, it skipped it. And so I just went to the next line and kept singing. So thank you all for keeping up and letting that little mistake move past.

I want to lift up a couple of things today that are clear from the readings on Pentecost. And they're really key for us to keep in mind because this is such an important teaching about the spirit today. And the first is that you see in both of the readings that the spirit is talked about, not simply as a moment in which the spirit is received by the church, but the spirit is always moving beyond where we think the spirit will be going. And so Jethro and Moses have this meeting after the movement through the Red Sea, when Pharaoh's army is destroyed and the Spirit is running through them, the *ruach* is the Hebrew of God. And God has led Moses through the spirit and led the people of God through the Red Sea, through the great ordeal and has carried them into freedom.

And Jethro meets Moses and brings back his wife and children who Moses has sent to his father-in-law for safekeeping while he did this dangerous mission. And they have a moment of giving thanks to God for God's mighty actions and they have a sacrifice and they have a meal of bread. And later in Exodus, Moses will go and meet a wise king, Melchizedek, who is also a priest, and Melchizedek will have a meal of bread and wine with him. And that will be in some sense for Christians, the beginning of the sacramental life of meeting God in the spirit, of having a meal of bread and wine.

When we look back to our ancestors, that spirit led mission of God, of liberation is clear. And in our gospel from John, there is another moment in which Jesus experiences the spirit operating in the Samaritan woman, and He's blown away by her witness and her willingness to stay in conversation. And operating in the back of that is another Hebrew word, *shekinah*, which means indwelling. So *ruach* means breath and that you'll see throughout the Hebrew scriptures, when a great prophet or great leader will be leading God's people in a powerful way. Saul and David, when they go into battle, receive the *ruach* of God. They are given the power of God to do God's mission. But *shekinah* means the indwelling of God. And when Jesus has this meeting with the woman at the well, He offers her living water, He offers her the *shekinah* of God. And that indwelling is another manifestation of the Spirit.

Now, Pentecost is a moment in which we think about those two great streams of thought within Judaism. Pentecost goes with the grain of those two great streams within Judaism, and it goes beyond them in pivoting it around Jesus. But it means something that is internal to Judaism that brings it into a kind of universal frame. Because when God creates this world, so one stream of Jewish thought says, when God chooses to create this world, God has to actually contract and make space, so this Jewish theology says. God, who is all and in all, God who is present everywhere, there is no place where God's *shekinah* is not to be found. And yet to create this world, God creates space. And into that space, God creates us. The *shekinah* of God, when it goes into that space where God creates, so this Jewish theology says, is one in which God willingly accepts a kind of wound and a kind of suffering to be present to God's people.

We experience that as power that is manifest. But when God's *ruach* is in us, when God's *shekinah* is in us, it is an act of God's emptying of God's self, of God's limitation, of God making space, of God experiencing a kind of wound so that we would be in relationship with God. And that is the pivot point at which Christianity begins to think about Pentecost because for us Pentecost doesn't mean just that God has given the spirit to the church. It means that God has been willing to be wounded so that we might live anew in Christ. And when we experience that power from God in our life, through the Spirit, it often takes us to places we never imagined we could go.

Imagine Jethro, seeing his son-in-law come back from having led the people of God through an incredible liberation movement. Imagine seeing this young leader, Moses, who Jethro had pointed out to his daughters when they said that someone defended them – when they were trying to water their sheep, someone came along and defended them when they needed defense. And Jethro says, who is that young man? And they bring him Moses and he becomes part of their family. Imagine that unbelievable surprise to Jethro to see Moses suddenly filled with the spirit and leading God's people.

And imagine Jesus in seeing this woman, this Samaritan, this person who He should never be interacting with, and yet she decides she's going to be cheeky and she's going to engage Him. And imagine her surprise when she experiences that spirit. Hmm. That is Pentecost too, because the Spirit begins in the mission of God coming out, reaching out so that we might be filled. Yes, we're living through a difficult time in this world, in this church, in this community, we're all going through an incredible kind of molting in which we're being invited sometimes to let the shell break apart and fall off us, entering into that vulnerable time where like a crab, we have to hide in the clefts of rocks and in the shadows until that shell grows back.

This is all part of God's creation, but it's all a kind of emblem of our own transformation in Christ. And in the midst of all that, what Pentecost tells us is that the Spirit will ever always be leading us to something new, something more powerful, something closer to God. It doesn't promise us that we will not suffer. It doesn't promise us that we will not encounter difficulty. It doesn't promise us that we won't be confused or frustrated or sad, but the spirit will lead us.

Years ago. I was having lunch with the archbishop of Toronto and he was such a delightful man. And I was studying religious patterns of behaviors a lot because one of my branches was sociology of religion. If any of you ever look at the kind of direction of the sociology of religion, you see this kind of unbelievable decline. And I said to the archbishop, he said, "What are you learning?" I said, "Well, in about 10 years, there's going to be none of us. Other than that, we have nothing to worry about. Just read the demographics. We're dying." And he looked at me and I thought, well, I didn't mean to ruin this man's life. And he began to sing this song:

Surprise, surprise  
God is a surprise  
Hidden from the wise  
Right before your eyes  
Surprise, surprise  
God is a surprise  
Open up your eyes and see

This Pentecost, let God surprise you. Open your eyes and see.