



SOME ASSEMBLY REQUIRED

St. James' United Church Christian Education Committee Newsletter

Welcome

From Pamela Norman, Chair of the Christian Education Committee

After the joy of Easter, we sweep away the tail end of winter and settle into the seemingly endless season of Spring. At the same time, the Christian Calendar also leads us into its longest season, that of Pentecost. For 50 days we wait. Scripture tells us that on the fiftieth day after Easter, the Holy Spirit descended on the Apostles and other disciples. It was after Pentecost that these early Christians began to spread across the world bringing the Good News.

It is a time for good news, for optimism. The joy of a story to be shared and the hope for a better future. Then as now, there are many parallels between the seasons of nature and the church. The sombre preparation of Lent leads into the Celebration of Easter. The sorrow of the crucifixion leads to the joy of the Resurrection. The darkness of Winter leads to the light of Spring. Death and darkness become life and light. It is human nature to yearn for brighter days, for good news. The quiet reflection during the darker sombre days help prepare us to go forth and spread good news and good cheer. Remember the Spirit is always at work as the deeper vibration in us all. Let us take heart, holding faith and hope close to our hearts as we look to the future.

Pamela

Bi·ble

/'bībəl/ - noun

- 1. the Christian scriptures, consisting of the Old and New Testaments.**
- 2. a book regarded as authoritative in a particular sphere.**

"Christ is the norm, the criterion, the purpose, and the meaning of the book. The book points to Christ; Christ does not point to the book. We are not the People of the Book; we are the People with the Book. The Gospel of John does not say, "God so loved the world that he gave us" a book (3:16)...If Christ is the norm of the gospel, then he is also the norm of the New Testament, and of the entire Christian Bible. That, of course, is why we are called Christ-ians and not Bible-ians."

- John Dominic Crossan, The Greatest Prayer: A Revolutionary Manifesto and Hymn of Hope

Pentecost Weekly Readings

Day of Pentecost - May 23, 2021

Pentecost - In images of wind, fire, and bleached bones, we experience the Spirit of God that rushes to renew what is perceived dead and unifies individuals across languages, and are encouraged that God is still at work bringing life into unexpected areas of our lives.

- Acts 2: 1-21
- Ezekiel 37:1-14
- Psalm 104:24-34, 35b
- Romans 8:22-27
- John 15:26-27,16:4b-15

The challenge of Pentecost is in remembering the power of the Spirit at work every day of the year. Celebrate Pentecost by doing something that reminds you of your resurrection into new life.

2nd Sunday of Pentecost - June 6, 2021

Unanticipated Vulnerability - We hold our breath as the leaders of Israel move for a change of leadership and Samuel finds himself in a vulnerable place, leaving us to consider what it means to relinquish some of our freedom to follow God's way.

- 1 Samuel 8:4-11,16-20
- Psalm 138
- 2 Corinthians 4:13-5:1
- Mark 3:20-35

Sometimes we want something so we can be like others. This can be true for individuals, churches, communities, or nations. Sometimes it can get us into trouble. Think of times in history where this has happened. What about you? This week, consider ways and times you look to God's leading.

Trinity Sunday - May 30, 2021

Called, Cleaned and Committed - Trinity Sunday invites us to reckon with the mystery and power of God Creator, Redeemer, Sustainer - who calls us into new life and service

- Isaiah 6:1-8
- Psalm 29
- Romans 8:12-17
- John 3:1-17

We encounter God in many ways. God's love is constant, but different times and moods cause us to connect with God differently from time to time. This week, recall some of the ways you have encountered God. What has been your response each time?

3rd Sunday of Pentecost - June 13, 2021

Unexpected Leadership - The story of David's anointing as King of Israel and a parable of mustard seed potential invites us to look beyond appearances to potential.

- 1 Samuel 15:34 -16:13
- Psalm 20
- 2 Corinthians 5:6-10,14-17
- Mark 4:26-34

Often we can be quick to judge based on appearance. Reflect on times when you make assumptions about someone based on how they sound or dress and had your assumptions proven wrong. How did it feel? This week, try to look beyond appearances and into hearts.



4th Sunday of Pentecost - June 20, 2021

Authentic Leadership - David discarding Saul's armour and standing before Goliath, and Jesus speaking peace to calm a storm and fearful disciples, inspires us to be our authentic self and act courageously for justice for all.

- 1 Samuel 17: 32-49
- Psalm 9:9-20
- 2 Corinthians 6:1-13
- Mark 4:35-41

When we feel threatened, attacked, or bullied, scripture reminds us that with trust and faith in God and the example of Jesus, we have the tools to defuse these challenges. This week, imagine ways you will use the gifts of God to diffuse a difficult situation.

6th Sunday of Pentecost - July 4, 2021

Resilient Leadership - As we witness Jesus' rejection in his ministry and watch as disciples are sent out in ministry, we are encouraged to brush away the dust of preconceptions and step into sharing the ministry toward a more loving and peaceful world.

- 2 Samuel 5:1-5, 9-10
- Psalm 48
- 2 Corinthians 12:2-10
- Mark 6:1-13

Jesus attempts to do ministry in his hometown and is rejected, ironically, by people who think they know him. Jesus is disempowered by their unbelief. This does not hold Jesus back; he sends the disciples out to continue doing God's ministry. We are all called to ministry by God. This week, consider to what God might be calling you. Who might encourage you in that? Make contact with that person.

5th Sunday of Pentecost - June 27, 2021

Compassionate Leadership - In stories and readings about love and risks, we are challenged to take the risk of being deeply and compassionately involved in the world.

- 2 Samuel 1:1, 17-27
- Psalm 130
- 2 Corinthians 8:7-15
- Mark 5:21-43

Jesus wants to know who touched his robe, not to scold but to commend faith. He continues to the synagogue leader's family, despite being told it is pointless because the child is dead. A reminder to press on with our work, even when all seems pointless. This week, reflect on a time when you have felt discouraged. How did you carry on, or how could you carry on?

7th Sunday of Pentecost - July 11, 2021

Lavishing Grace - King David's dance testifies to the lavish love and grace of God, and we, with the earlier recipients of the letter to the Ephesians, experience that grace through our inclusion into the family of God.

- 2 Samuel 6:1-5, 12b-19
- Psalm 24
- Ephesians 1:3-14
- Mark 6:14-29

Jesus and the Holy Spirit guide us back into right relationship with God. This is a gift of grace from God: when we place our faith in God. God's salvation - or health and wholeness - is ours. This week, ponder this question: When do you feel a close relationship with God?



8th Sunday of Pentecost - July 18, 2021

Building without Walls - We receive a letter penned to the early church and us that assures all are included in God's family, and consider what that means in the life of the church.

- 2 Samuel 7:1-14a
- Psalm 89:20-37
- Ephesians 2:11-22
- Mark 6:30-34, 53-56

Through his life, teachings and ministry, Jesus united all peoples - even former enemies - and encouraged a move from strict adherence to legal details to a new understanding of the overall nature of God's law: love God, love your neighbour, love self. This week, think of a time when you were bothered by the details of obedience and felt freed by focusing instead on God's call to love one another.

10th Sunday of Pentecost - August 1, 2021

Grow, Grow Together - An image of the church knit together as one body challenges us to live a connected life and grow together in truth and love nourished by the Bread of Life.

- 2 Samuel 11:26-12:13a
- Psalm 51:1-12
- Ephesians 4:1-16
- John 6:24-35

There are many forms of ministry and many different gifts that each of us receives. No one is to be all things to all people, nor masters of everything. Instead, God invests talents, gifts, and graces in each one of us, and challenges us to use those to build up the church and community. This week, reflect on a time when you felt you had to "do it all" and remember that God does not expect that of us.

9th Sunday of Pentecost - July 25, 2021

More Than Enough - As we watch a multitude fed and a storm and fearful disciples calmed, we read a letter to the early church that reminds us that God's love has no bounds.

- 2 Samuel 11:1-15
- Psalm 14
- Ephesians 3:14-21
- John 6:1-21

After feeding the huge crowd- a miracle that reminds us of God's provision - Jesus comes to terrified disciples. With words of peace, Jesus calms the storm and their fear. In all kinds of situations, we realize that Christ is with us. Not physically but in a way that reminds us that no matter what is going on around us, God will help get us through. This week, reflect on a time when you felt scared, abandoned, or alone. Create a prayer/poem/psalm that tells of God's presence and provision in the experience.

11th Sunday of Pentecost - August 8, 2021

Help Not Hinder - Reminded by the letter writer that we are members of one another and our welfare is inextricably linked, we are challenged and inspired to live as imitators of God, nourished and sustained by the Bread of Life

- 2 Samuel 18:5-9,15, 31-33
- Psalm 130
- Ephesians 4:25-5:2
- John 6:35, 41-51

Anger is a universal human emotion. It is not always a negative emotion; sometimes, it inspires positive action. However, it can also eat away at us. The advice not to let the sun set on our anger is good advice, for it encourages us to deal with that anger and not to let it fester. This week, consider a situation or issue that is making you angry. How might you turn that anger into positive action?



12th Sunday of Pentecost - August 15, 2021

Spend Time Well - Solomon's prayer for guidance and discernment, and a letter offering concrete guidance on living a life shaped by the gospel of Jesus, the Bread, invite us to consider how we spend our time so who we are and how we live is in alignment.

- 1 Kings 2:10-12; 3:3-14
- Psalm 111
- Ephesians 5:15-21
- John 6:51-58

This letter to the Ephesians makes comparisons between life in the Spirit, and life in accordance with God's way as opposed to life focused on self and things of the current world. We are encouraged to be filled with God's Spirit, to sing and make praise with heart and voice. This week, think of a song of praise that speaks to your heart and sing it.

14th Sunday of Pentecost - August 29, 2021

Live Love - We celebrate God's love for all in a love poem and a song of praise, and, as we open the letter of James, are challenged to find connections between what we believe and say about God and the actions we take each day.

- Song of Solomon 2: 8-13
- Psalm 45:1-2,6-9
- James 1:17-27
- Mark 7:1-8, 14-15, 21-23

The letter of James reminds us of the perpetual biblical imperative to care for the orphans and widows. James then tells us to be people who do not just hear God's word, but people who do God's word. This week, talk about ways you can show God's love in your community. Move from talk to action.

13th Sunday of Pentecost - August 22, 2021

Prayers and Protection - We enter Solomon's temple, a place of prayer of all people and shelter for the most vulnerable, and come to the end of the letter to the Ephesians with encouragement to stand firm in love and prayer clothed in truth, righteousness, and peace.

- 1 Kings 8:(1,6,10-11) 22-30, 41-43
- Psalm 84
- Ephesians 6:10-20
- John 6:56-69

The author knows the people in the early church do not have the means to confront the power of Rome. But what they do have is something more important. Armed with truth, righteousness, a readiness to proclaim the gospel of peace, we too can confront all that this world can throw at us. This week, consider ways God equips us. What are you ready to do?

Pentecost Prayer Flags

The tradition of hanging prayer flags is ancient, dating back thousands of years to India and then to Tibet and Buddhism. Traditionally, prayer flags are used to promote peace, compassion, strength, and wisdom. The flags do not carry prayers to gods, which is a common misconception; rather, the Tibetans believe the prayers and mantras will be blown by the wind to spread the good will and compassion into all pervading space.

As our movement is still restricted due to the virus, why not make a string of prayer flags to hang outside your home to spread your prayers for hope, peace, compassion and love on the ever blowing wind. Consider making your flag(s) in the colours red, yellow and orange to represent pentecost flames and white for the Spirit. As language is another key part of the Pentecost story, look up words for love, peace, hope etc in other languages to include on your flag(s).

Have everyone in your household make a flag.

How to Make Prayer Flags

1. Cut pieces of fabric to 5" × 11". Use materials you already have on hand.
2. Fold the top down on each piece of fabric and stitch in place to create a 3" sleeve, making the flag surface 5" × 8".
3. Paint, stitch, applique, draw or collage the flags.
4. Add words, journaling, or symbols as desired.
5. Thread the flags onto a string or cord and hang them outdoors so the breeze will catch them and spread your intentions.
6. Make a flag every day, once a month, or just when the spirit moves you.



The Season of Pentecost

Susan Sheppard, DLM, Minister of Youth and Christian Education

This season of the church year begins on Pentecost Day (usually in May and continues on till Reign of Christ Sunday at the end of November). It is the longest season of the church year.

The word Pentecost comes from Greek meaning 50th. It is one of the three major Jewish festivals and is celebrated 50 days after Passover to commemorate God giving the Ten Commandments to Moses. It is also known as the Feast of Harvest as offerings of the first fruits of the spring harvest were presented at the Temple at this time. Jewish law required all adult Jewish men to come to Jerusalem from wherever they were living to personally be in attendance for the Celebration

In the Book of Acts we are told ...“When the day of Pentecost came...there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven...Parthians, Medes, Elamites, residents of Mesopotamia, Judea, Cappadocia, Pontus, Asia, Phrygia, Pamphylia, Egypt, Libya and Rome, Cretans and Arabs” (Acts 2:1, 5, 9-11). It is into this Pentecost festival that the violent wind and tongues of flames rushed into the house where the followers of Jesus were gathered, filling them with the Holy Spirit and sending them out to spread the Gospel.

In the first 14 weeks of the season of Pentecost we will read the story of the demands of the people of Israel for a King, God’s choice of a shepherd to lead them and the building of the Temple of prayer for all people. We will learn of Jesus’ ministry, teaching, leading and sending disciples, while also exploring what it means to be church and community in the early church letters.

Through these stories we will get a glimpse of God’s justice, wholeness, equality, inclusion, and peace for all creation.

May you enjoy this first half of the Season of Pentecost, or as we say in Godly Play - The Great Green Growing Season. Take some time to re-create in nature, garden, read, write, draw, knit, sew, woodwork, whatever brings you some downtime and peace during these summer months as we prepare to gather again in the fall.

Susan

The Jubilee of Pentecost

Rev. Ettie Gordon-Murray, Member of the Christian Education Committee

Hello Friends,

We are fast approaching the jubilant Day of Pentecost - the day that commemorates the coming of the Holy Spirit to Jesus' followers while gathered in Jerusalem imparting to them energy and enthusiasm to carry on Jesus' mission - a mission which evolved into our Christian church.

In Jesus' Jewish context, the Festival of Weeks or Pentecost (Leviticus 23:16-17) occurred fifty days after Passover. In our Christian context, with different emphasis, it occurs fifty days after the Resurrection. In Jesus' day, as a pilgrimage festival of obligation, participants gathered in Jerusalem for its rituals.

In our Christian context, the Day of Pentecost commemorates the coming of the Holy Spirit to the disciples and other followers of the Way of Jesus. The Day of Pentecost also acts as the threshold to the longest season of our church year - the Season of Pentecost. In recent times, interrupted with a season within a season designated - Creation Time.

Often on the Day of Pentecost the scripture text we hear and reflect on comes from the Book of Acts - which describes the gathering of a diverse group of people and the Pentecost event.

Now, permit me to share with you an encounter and experience of what I call a Pentecost moment that has its setting on the evening of the joyful Resurrection Day - fifty days earlier than the time we acknowledge as the Day of Pentecost - intriguing I thought!

One day while prayerfully reading a familiar passage from the Gospel of John (see below) some of the words and phrases beckoned my attention as they had not before. It was as though I heard or read them for the first time. While I noted the reference to Thomas and his doubts, the three phrases that caught my attention the most are "peace be with you" he "breathed on them" and "receive the Holy Spirit."

The fact that the setting of this episode of our story takes place on the evening of the day of Resurrection in a locked room where the disciples had gathered out of fear and Jesus stood amongst them was also significant. That passionate care (love) can overcome all obstacles - it can infiltrate locked doors - indeed, not only ordinary locked doors but the locked doors of our hearts and minds that opens us to new ways of communicating and of being.

Now, let me take us back to those three phrases that caught my attention the most "peace be with you" he "breathed on them" and "receive the Holy Spirit."

Jesus reminds those gathered in the locked room and us that the call to discipleship is not without its obligations: 'Just as God, my parent- appointed me to work toward the fulfillment of God's vision for Creation so, by that authority, I appoint you' Jesus says.



Then in the intimacy of being as close as a breath he completes the assignment of authority to those called to carry on his mission - he breathed on them... as he breathed on them, he offered to empower them with renewed energy and motivation for the task at hand. In the intimacy of his breath, he breathed the words 'Receive the Holy Spirit' - the life giving, life sustaining, Spirit of God... here, hours after the discovery of the empty tomb we are given a foretaste of the Day of Pentecost - some fifty days in the future...

...and here we are now about to enter into that future...

As current day followers of Jesus, through the hearing of these words we have been breathed on and offered the gift of the Spirit of life. It is the enabling Spirit that enlivens us to make a difference - in heart, attitude, and action. How will you respond?

In the ongoing tumultuous days of the COVID-19 pandemic, may God bless us all with peace and deepening understanding into our part, in action and spirit, to passionately care for each other in God's realm - in our time.

Peace, health, love
Ettie

John 20: 19-30

Jesus Appears to the Disciples

¹⁹ When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, 'Peace be with you.' ²⁰After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. ²¹Jesus said to them again, 'Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.' ²²When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit. ²³If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.'

Jesus and Thomas

²⁴ But Thomas (who was called the Twin*), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. ²⁵So the other disciples told him, 'We have seen the Lord.' But he said to them, 'Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe.'

²⁶ A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, 'Peace be with you.' ²⁷Then he said to Thomas, 'Put your finger here and see my hands.

Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe.' ²⁸Thomas answered him, 'My Lord and my God!' ²⁹Jesus said to him, 'Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.'

The Purpose of This Book

³⁰ Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. ³¹But these are written so that you may come to believe* that Jesus is the Messiah,* the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.



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