

PENTECOST/MOTHER'S DAY
“Mother Earth, Wind and Fire”
Sermon by Karen Hilfman Millson
St. Paul's United Church, Orillia
May 11, 2008

Scripture Readings: Acts 2

I love the images of Pentecost, of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, an energy that transforms our energy.

“She comes sailing on the wind, breathing new life into life, coming like crackling sparkling flames, tongues of fire, filling our dreams and visions with new possibility of deserts turning to gardens and broken hearts finding new delight, full of light and full of laughter.”

Laughter...there is a joke that always makes me chuckle. It's about who Jesus is, which reminds us of the fullness of who we all are.

We cannot be defined or pigeon-holed, but rather are full of wonderful intricate ways of being.

Highlights of the joke are—

- How do you know that Jesus was Jewish?
He was sure his mother was a virgin, and his mother was sure he was God.
- On the other hand, there are good arguments that Jesus was Black.
He called everyone brother, and he liked gospel.
- But then there are good arguments that Jesus was Californian.
He never cut his hair and walked around barefoot, and he started a new religion.
- But there's evidence that he may have been Aboriginal.
He was at peace with nature, he ate a lot of fish, and he talked about the great Spirit.
- But the most compelling evidence seems to point to the possibility that Jesus was a woman.
He fed a large crowd at a moment's notice when there was virtually no food;

he kept trying to get a message across to a bunch of men
 who just didn't get what he was trying to say;
 and even when he was dead, he had to get up
 because there was more work to do.

After Jesus' death his friends and followers huddled behind locked doors or
 went back to the familiarity of fishing.
 When the Jewish festival of Pentecost came,
 they all gathered together in Jerusalem,
 too overwhelmed by their sorrow to enter into the celebrations.
 But then something amazing happened.

They experienced an incredible new birthing
 that was a life-transforming experience.
 It changed them from a forlorn, despondent, despairing group
 lost without their leader to being a Spirit-filled group
 who boldly told of their experiences of God made known to them through
 the life and witness of Jesus.

This group risked speaking boldly even amongst the temple authorities who
 had been part of arranging Jesus' death.
 With the power of the Holy Spirit within them, they could not be silenced,
 for the story they had to tell was bursting out of them...
 a story of a time when people would dream dreams
 and see visions of a world where there is justice and where compassion,
 rather than control, is the value that inspires people
 as we seek to live lives filled with joy and hope, gratitude and possibility, by
 walking a new pathway that leads to life...
 rather than walking the path of life fearful of death.

Pentecost, a story of rebirth, fits well with Mother's Day,
 not only because it's a birth story,
 but because Mother's Day has its roots in a dream of peace,
 a vision of a time when the world will function
 in such a way that we know ourselves to be one community—
 a transition that will need the efforts of
 all our feminine and maternal powers.

History professor Ruth Rosen notes that,

“The women who conceived Mother’s Day would be bewildered by the ads that hound us to find that ‘perfect gift for Mom’.

They would expect women to be marching in the streets,
not eating with their families in restaurants,
because Mothers’ Day began as a holiday to commemorate
women’s public activism...

many women in the nineteenth century were clear that they bore a special
responsibility [as mothers and as potential mothers]...
to care for the casualties of society.

“They played a leading role in the movement to end slavery...
they launched successful campaigns against lynching and consumer fraud
and battled for improved working conditions for women,
public health services, and social welfare assistance to the poor.
The connection between motherhood and the fight for social and economic
justice seemed self-evident to these activists.”

Professor Rosen expresses the concern that today the greatest threat that we
face is our indifference toward human welfare
and the health of our planet.

She has visions of a day when there is an annual Million Mothers March in
the capitals of the world.

She sees a Mother’s Day filled with, not only appreciation of the mothering
people of this world, but also voices demanding
social and economic justice and a sustainable future.

This was the vision of the original Mother’s Day Proclamation,
which was a call for women to unite in our efforts
to be actively involved in making decisions
that impact the well-being and peace of the world.

Earlier this month, environmentalist/author Alanna Mitchell was here at St.
Paul’s to share her newest research on the state of the earth’s ocean, which is
the basis for her soon-to-be-released book, *Sea Sickness*.

In the book, she uses the metaphor of a human body
to try to explain what she is hearing from scientists
from all over the world about the state of our earth’s oceans.

She explained that a human body can tolerate only a .1% change
in ph balance before it begins to die.

The earth’s ocean has already had a .1% change in its ph balance, moving it
toward becoming more acidic.

And no one knows what implications this will have on... life.

Alanna told me the story of a world-renowned scientist who was doing tests
on the impact of higher acidity in the oceans.

The day that it became clear to her that plankton cannot form properly in
higher acidity (plankton being the source of a large percentage of our
oxygen), this scientist got up from her workstation
to go to be physically sick,
for her natural instincts for the earth were so overwhelmed.

The evening with Alanna ended with conversation in the circle
after she shared her story of being overwhelmed by her research
but then, in the midst of her despair,
she experienced profound hope.

Her hope arose from the realization that one of the greatest capacities we
have as humans is to hope.
And it's hope that inspires us to action.

That's what the power of the Holy Spirit was like on that day of Pentecost so
long ago: unexplainable, but hope was born anew, hope that called the
followers of Jesus—then and now—to action,
to go forth into the world as a source of hope.

For with hope we begin to see more clearly; we begin to see differently.

On that night in the conversation with Alanna,
one woman in the circle spoke with great passion.

With tears welling up, she spoke of how she believes that we as women have
a special calling to take care of the water...
the birthing waters out of which life comes.

As a mother and as a potential grandmother some day, she spoke of a calling
to all people—though women in particular—
to respond to the devastation of the waters on Mother Earth.

We need a passion for Mother Earth, inspired and empowered
by the wind and fire of the Holy Spirit,
to make a commitment to healing, to protection, to nurturing the waters of
the earth just as the mothering spirit that is within each of us
longs to heal, protect, and nurture the children of the earth.

When our maternal side awakens, we see the world through new eyes and
our hearts open wide to greater caring.

The awakening of our maternal side can happen
at different times through our lives:

- when we become parents or grandparents
- when we make our commitment in baptism to be part of raising all children in our care in a way that honours and encourages them on their spiritual journey
- when we come to a time in life when we begin to understand ourselves to be the elders of the youngest generation, the youngest among us who need the wisdom, the patience, the delight of elders in their lives.

I'm in the midst of experiencing that in a new way right now.

Our daughter Sarah and our new son, Darren, are expecting a child.

The pregnancy is in the early stages yet, but I am amazed at
how much that awareness has already changed me inside.

It has made me even more profoundly aware of our interconnectedness, and more aware of the kind of world I want the next generation (whoever they are) to inherit from our generation.

It's awakening something deep inside...a change, a shift, an awakening that feels, at least a little, like a kind of Pentecost experience, like the disciples who were changed by the Holy Spirit.

So too does the Spirit change us, helping us to become clear, like the followers of Jesus became clear, about what is important in life.

Through the coming of the power of the Holy Spirit, the disciples became clear about the type of people they wanted to be and the type of world they wanted to help create.

Peggy Campola, wife of inspirational speaker Tony Campola, once described well the role of being a mother, a role that is a key calling to all of us in the church.

She said, "I am nurturing two homo sapiens into dominant values of the Judaeo-Christian tradition in order that they might become instruments for the transformation of the social order into the kind of eschatological utopia God envisioned from the beginning of time."

The woman she said that to responded saying,
 “Oh my. I’m just a lawyer.”

AS with the disciples before us,
 the Holy Spirit longs to be poured out on us,
 so that we become even more clear
 about the type of people we want to be
 and the type of world we want to help create.

As the Spirit dances into our lives, we are empowered to reach out,
 to share that maternal love that is within all of us,
 to give of ourselves with a generosity that arises from a passion for healing
 the woundedness of this world,
 so that together we can help grow the kind of caring world
 that is filled with creativity and laughter and shared tears.

That is the vision, the dream that has stirred in our hearts
 from the beginning.
 It’s a dream that deserts will become gardens, that all will live in peace.
 It begins in our one-on-one relationships,
 as we allow hope and compassion to lead us.
 Then it spreads.

On this Pentecost Sunday, on this day of celebrating the mothering spirit
 awakening within us, may this be our prayer:

Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on me;
 meet me, mould me, fill me, use me.
 Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on me.
 Spirit of the living God, move among us all;
 make us one in heart and mind; make us one in love:
 humble, caring, self-less, sharing.
 Spirit of the living God, fill our lives with love!

Amen. May it be so. Amen.