

New St. James Presbyterian Church
Sunday, June 9, 2019
Rev. Dr. David Thompson

Dedicated to the memory of John Stewart

Real Power is ethical power

Text: "Stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high."

Martin Luther King Jr. once said, "Let us realize the arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice."

There are very real differences in the world between the English and the Scots. For instance, An Englishman and a Scot are walking home after work one day, talking about what they plan to do that night. The Englishman notices an envelope laying in the gutter. He picks it up, looks it all over, and says, "I wonder what's in this packed envelope? It's unopened."

"How should I know?" said the Scot, "Why don't you open it and see?"

The Englishman opens the envelope and stares at its contents. "Would you believe my luck," he says to the Scot as he was counting. "I've just found \$500.00 cash in a wage packet! It's my lucky day!"

"Let me see the payslip inside the envelope," says the Scot.

The Englishman gave the payslip to the Scot. The Scot glanced at the figures on the payslip then said to the Englishman, "I wouldn't call it lucky. Just look at the amount of tax you paid!"

I was watching President Trump and the Mayor of London England Sadiq Khan, go at their war of words. Sadiq Khan is a British born child of Pakistani parents. He is a Muslim. He believes in diversity and inclusion. He has opposed The US travel ban against Muslims from the start in a public way. He has attacked Donald Trump.

As London's first Muslim mayor, he has said that **anyone from anywhere could help the diverse city flourish**. Over 300 languages are spoken in London.

Trump has slammed the London mayor as a "Stone cold loser". The contrast between the two leaders is cavernous.

Diversity is with us in Canada to stay. As year passes after year the diversity in this country increases. We have affirmed multi culturalism rather than the melting pot ideology. But sadly, we have failed the native population of Canada with our failed attempts at residential schools and injustice against the missing and murdered indigenous women.

Any attempt to redress the inequity is likely to fuel the extreme right wing who found nothing wrong with the residential schools and the status quo which ignored our native peoples.

In California when I was there it was often argued that the state was ungovernable because the diversity was too great. There were too many competing interests vying for attention.

When first we confront problems like diversity and immigration in the West we have in the past designed systems and organizations; like immigration and naturalization and citizenship. But when these systems get under too much strain, they become increasingly inflexible and unable to handle the diversity, the numbers and the differences.

There is pressure beyond what systems can handle on the American Mexican border because of unrest in Latin American countries like Venezuela. The US border has seen waves of immigrants and so some very distressing things have been done, like separating children from their parents as a method of coping with the numbers. Many things have been done that are cruel in an attempt to discourage immigration. And the systems are not working.

In Italy the government has refused to allow ships to dock who have immigrants on board. Thousands now have drowned in the Mediterranean Sea in an attempt to get to Europe. Tragedy follows tragedy in the sheer desperation people have to leave their country in search of a better life.

And the right-wing populist ideology has grown as a consequence of the failures of these systems to actually deal with the pressures. The answers for them are black and white. Build a wall. Keep them out by all means possible. Use the military if necessary. Threaten to slap tariffs on Mexico until they stop the flow of immigrants.

It used to be that when people poured into the streets on behalf of democracy there would be regime change. No more! Think Tiananmen Square, think Syria, Venezuela and the Sudan. In these countries military force has stemmed democracy and tyrannical power rules these nations. Human rights are routinely violated, and people are killed, imprisoned and tortured.

Many people when interviewed in the streets today think that we are going backwards as a world. That the right wing is ascendant in Germany where the holocaust took place is unthinkable if you believe in moral progress. But it is happening there. We seem to be lapsing back into tribalism as a world. Diversity is seen as a weakness.

Today is Pentecost Sunday. What has Pentecost got to do with the challenges we face as a world? Pentecost had something right that we have got terribly wrong.

For instance, often we think that diversity is a modern problem. It is not. It happens whenever something is not right in the world. People go on the move for a better life and the world has seen mass migrations before. After the Highland clearances the Scots emigrated all over the world. They came to Canada and some founded New St. James. Think of the potato famine in Ireland and the waves of immigration to Canada and the United States that followed.

At the time of Christ there was also disruption in the Roman world as the Romans subjugated entire peoples including Palestine.

At the time of Pentecost there was incredible diversity in Jerusalem.

There were Parthians, Medes, Elamites, folks from Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus, Asia, Phrygia, Pamphylia, Egypt, parts of Libya and Cyrene. There were visitors from Rome, Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabs. What a collection of ideologies, religions and value systems!

But note this. On the day of Pentecost all these people understood Galileans speaking in Aramaic, but it was heard as if they had been speaking in their own language. It was like having headphones on at the United Nations!

Here is the vital point to notice: The diversity of opinion, viewpoint, culture values and religions **was suddenly broken**, and a kind of unity took place. Everyone there understood. In other words, a miracle took place. Some greater force from the outside broke in and produced **unity amidst incredible diversity**.

That says to me that unity in diversity as a goal is possible, and that everyone can be made to understand each other. For me, Pentecost is like the last page of history put into the middle of history so that we could understand **that diversity is not a problem for the God who created us all**. Diversity was not and is not a barrier for the Holy Spirit. We are all God's children no matter how diverse we may be, whatever sexual orientation we may have, we have a common humanity.

Remember what St. Paul said: In Christ there is no Jew nor Greek nor bond nor free, you are all one.

When St. Paul was in Athens, he stressed the unity of human beings in the following words:

“The God who made the world and everything in it, is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by human hands.²⁵ And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything. Rather, **he himself gives everyone life and breath and everything else.**²⁶ **From one man he made all the nations**, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he marked out their appointed times in history and the boundaries of their lands. ²⁷ God did this so that they would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from any one of us. ²⁸ **‘For in him we live and move and have our being.’^[a] As some of your own poets have said, ‘We are his offspring.’^[b]**

Here is what the Scripture is teaching us: Though we balk at diversity and seek to protect things like tribalism, nationalism and languages, **underneath we are all one humanity**. True Christian faith occurs when we decide that as followers of Christ that “There is no male no female, no Jew nor Greek no bond nor free, we are all one!”

I have always loved the sonnet written for the statue of Liberty. It enshrined for many the promise of America:

Here at our sea-washed, sunset gates shall stand
A mighty **woman** with a torch, whose flame
Is the imprisoned lightning, and her name
MOTHER OF EXILES. From her beacon-hand

Glows world-wide welcome; her mild eyes command
The air-bridged harbor that twin cities frame.

"Keep, ancient lands, your storied pomp!" cries she
With silent lips. "Give me your tired, your poor,
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tossed to me,
I lift my lamp beside the golden door!"

She is well named the Statue of Liberty!

Pentecost was the fulfillment of a promise: Stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high."

What kind of power does the Holy Spirit give?

Not the power evidenced in Sudan this past week. Not the repression in Tiananmen square. Not the kind of power that builds walls against desperate people fleeing for a new life. Not the power that built the wall in East Germany nor the wall in Israel. Not the military power that keeps Venezuela in poverty and repression. Not the military dictatorship's power that has killed 400,000 people in Syria.

There is a lot of power in the world that is destructive.

The Holy Spirit of God is not in that power because it is dark, it lies, and puts truth on the scaffold. It is dense, perplexing, complicating and it is full of fear and malice. It is aligned with corruption, violence and cannot brook freedom of the press or the power of the people. It opposes justice for all and liberty fundamentally, because it does not trust that the majority can govern themselves. It is determined to rule whatever the cost. The power elite know what is best and if you oppose the elite you will be liquidated.

But St. Paul says where the Holy Spirit of God is, there is liberty! - the very opposite to dark power!

What kind of power does the Holy Spirit give to us human beings if we seek it?

The Holy Spirit gives power to human beings when they want to do something beautiful for God. The holy Spirit gives power for ethical achievement.

Notice that the Holy Spirit does not destroy diversity. You don't have to stop being an Arab, a Parthian or a Mede or an American or a Canadian or any world citizen or ethnic group, to be able to understand that God is speaking to **you**. The Holy Spirit leads us through the maze of our diversity and brings goodness out of it.

Angele Merkle's policy of accepting immigrants along with their diversity may in the end solve a major problem for Germany- the aging of its population, for most immigrants are young.

Why not accept and welcome immigrants and the diversity they bring? Sure, there will be challenges and difficulties but are they not human beings like us? Do they not hurt and feel as we do? Do they not have children? Are they not mothers and fathers' grandmothers and grandfathers all seeking what is good for their families.? Are Canada and the US not nations of immigrants? Do we forget our roots when it is convenient to do so?

First, if we are to be empowered by the Holy Spirit, we need the Spirit's **values. Truth is *first* for the Holy spirit; truth that is spoken in love.**

St. John said: "The Holy Spirit whom the Father will send in my name will teach **you everything**. When he comes, who is the Spirit of Truth, he will guide you into all truth." The kind of truth guiding that the Holy Spirit gives us ,sets us free!

So, if we want to be empowered by the Holy Spirit and do something beautiful for God, something noble, something wonderful, then we must call upon the Holy Spirit who gives real power for ethical achievement.

Here is the test for ethical achievement:

- 1) Is what you want to do loving God with all your heart and mind and strength?
- 2) Is it loving to your neighbour?
- 3) Is it loving to yourself?
- 4) Is it loving to the enemy?

If so, it passes the ethical test of four, given by the Historical Jesus.

If your dream or project will better the world where you touch, then you can call upon the Holy Spirit to empower you. You will be able to influence your institution and make it better, your personal dreams will heal the world in some way. With the power of the Holy Spirit **you** can become a healer.

The power of the Holy Spirit can blow away the cobwebs, can break the chains that bind us until we are whole again and truly free in our own Spirit as the Great Creator made us. You will be free to dream again, to hope again, to live life to its fullest and finally to love. This is the meaning of Pentecost.

Pentecost is a gift that you can take down off the divine shelf of goodness and make your own. It is available to all who believe and who wish to live selflessly, as Christ taught us to live. It is also available to anyone in the world who wishes to make a positive difference.

Why?

Because The Holy Spirit is the Source of ethical power.

But if we want that power to make a difference, we must ask for it.

When we take Holy Spirit inside us into our minds and hearts, we will realize “the arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice.” With the gift of the Holy Spirit we can exchange our despair about the world for HOPE!

So, “Ask, and it **shall** be given **you**; **seek, and ye shall find**; knock, and it **shall** be opened unto **you**: For everyone that asketh receiveth; and those who seek. find; and to those who knock it **shall** be opened.”

There was a women’s conference in Oslo Norway. By the end of the conference Israeli women said that they supported the Palestinians right to resources, political integrity and freedom to live in the land. The Palestinian women said that they supported the Israeli’s right to an independent state. It was a very significant moment for both groups of women.

On the last night of the conference a Palestinian woman and an Israeli woman went out for a late coffee. They talked together past midnight.

When it came time to leave the older Israeli woman decided to walk the much younger Palestinian woman back to her hotel.

“I’ve had a wonderful night,” the Israeli woman said as they parted. This time spent with you was worth the conference.”

The younger Palestinian woman paused and said, “ I’m glad for you, but I am confused.”

The Israeli woman winced inside and asked what was wrong?

“Oh, nothing is wrong,” the younger woman said. “I am just confused. I don’t know what to do now that my enemy has become my friend.”

The next day at the airport in Tel Aviv the Israeli women went straight through baggage claim and customs. The Palestinian women did not. They were detained.

When the Israeli women realized that the Palestinian women had been detained, they turned around and refused to leave the custom’s hall themselves until all the Palestinian women were released.

The Holy Spirt will give power to anyone who wants to do the right, most loving, most ethical thing.

It doesn’t matter whether you are Parthians, Medes, Elamites, folks from Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus , Asia, Phrygia, Pamphylia, Egypt, parts of Libya and Cyrene or a visitors from Rome, Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabs Americans, Canadians, Russians, Chinese, Indonesians and Karens or any perceived enemy either personal, national or international.

When Abraham Lincoln was asked by a woman what to do with his enemies he simply said “Madam, I make them my friends.” The power to do that comes from the Holy Spirit because, **it is the ethical thing to do and real power is ethical power!**