

Moderator's Pentecost Message 2019

Transcript of Videotaped Message

Hello. My name is Richard Bott, Moderator of The United Church of Canada.

On the day of Pentecost, Jesus' disciples decided to go down to the marketplace. There, with people from all over the known world, and with the Holy Spirit, they began to tell the stories of Jesus. And everyone who was there understood what they were saying in their own mother tongues. The first ministry of the apostles was made possible by the mystery of the Holy Spirit.

This is one of the scripture stories I love. I wish we could take a month to focus on the presence of the Holy Spirit, not just in the Pentecost story but in many of the places the Spirit shows up in scripture.

I think that one of the things we would find is that the Holy Spirit is a harbinger of change—sometimes moving like a gale-force wind, sometimes in the whisper of a breath. Wherever we meet the Holy Spirit in scripture, from the first Creation story, to the dry bones given new life, to the stories of Lady Wisdom, to Jesus' baptism and time in the desert, to the first time the apostles spoke to the entire world about the good news of Jesus, spoke to the world—something amazing was about to happen.

The Holy Spirit—God's Spirit—is subversive. It blows where it wants to and, like the wind, can get up in our faces and move creation in unexpected ways. One of the things that I love about the Pentecost story is that the people gathered asked themselves, "How can we understand these Galileans, and in our own languages?!" It makes me wonder. The Holy Spirit may have landed on the apostles like tongues of flame, but did it change them—or did it change the people who were listening? Or perhaps both? Possibly opening something in *them* to the Jesus story?

As a denomination, The United Church of Canada believes that the Holy Spirit continues to move in the world. As we say in the New Creed, God "works in us, and others, by the Spirit." Where we recognize movements in the world that bring healing, hope, life, and *abundant* life for all creation, there's a pretty good chance that we've met the movement of the Holy Spirit.

When Paul was writing to the Galatians, he talked about the fruits of the Holy Spirit being "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control."

I wonder what it would be like if we took the time to keep our minds, our hearts, and our souls open to the movement of the Holy Spirit—not just inside our own lives, but out in the world around us? I wonder what we would find happening if we went searching for places where those fruits were growing? Perhaps, as communities of faith, we could go on "Spirit Sightings," where we regularly gather together to talk together about where we are experiencing the Holy Spirit moving in the world!

I wonder what the Holy Spirit might change in us as we experience the stories of the Spirit changing the world?

I'd love to hear about the Spirit Sightings you're having, in your life, your community of faith, and in the world!

May the Holy Spirit fill you this Pentecost, and may you be changed in amazing, life-giving ways.

Christ's peace to you!