



LESSONS for LIFE

MAY 31 11:00 a.m.

WILL YOU BELIEVE?

Rev. Dr. Brent Hawkes, C.M.

SACRED READINGS

Lesson: ACTS 2: 1 - 8

Gospel: ACTS 2: 11b- 18

As the story goes, that Pentecost day must have been quite an amazing moment, quite an amazing event for people present; so much so that it transformed the group. If you will go back just a little bit in the story, after Jesus was crucified and raised from the dead he spent time teaching the disciples and trying to get the message through one last time so that they would really get it. But even at the very last minute some folks still thought that Jesus would rescue Israel. They asked him, "Will you restore Israel? Will you rescue us?" and one more time Jesus turned it around and he said, "*You will restore power and YOU will be my witnesses,*" instead of him rescuing us he was saying that we will be the ones with the power and we will be the ones with the job to do. And then Jesus ascended into heaven and the disciples were standing there looking up and an angel appeared to them and said, "Why are you looking up into heaven? Get busy, there is work to do." So they all went back to Jerusalem – about a day's travel – and this time they were gathered in a room together; this time the disciples were joined together with a large crowd of followers: women and men together, believers and skeptics together – about 120 people together in this room. But this time they weren't gathered together out of fear; they were gathered together in anticipation, waiting for this gift that Jesus talked about; and this time, the scripture says, they were all of one accord. They were together in a spirit of unity; and as they were together something happened that day. The sound of a large wind came into the room so much so that people outside in the street heard the noise and started to gather. Tongues of fire appeared on the head of each person in the room. Now, if that happened today, in church, I'm sure some of you would write me an e-mail and say that's not the way we do worship from the tradition I am in; however, it happened that day in such a way that the people gathered really got the message: the presence of God is in this place.

You know, very often when new people come to worship here there are some common things that we hear about their first Sunday with us and one of those common things people talk about is that you can really feel the presence of God is in this place; and what I have found amazing is the number of e-mails we receive from folks watching the service on the webcast saying a similar kind of thing: one can really feel the presence of God in this place. Some of us who've been around for awhile I think we forget and take for granted the spirit in this place and the power within this place. But on that day they were so impacted by what they experienced that they went out and spoke in different languages so much so that people from many different countries and many different languages were able to hear the good news in their own language. The power of God's presence that day overcame language barriers. May the power of God's presence in this place help us to overcome some of the barriers that might divide us; help us to overcome the divisions in terms of language or country of origin or lifestyle or faith beliefs or disbeliefs. May the power of the presence of God in this place create the kind of unity that we can celebrate our differences and be one together. That day got them so excited that when they went outside and began speaking in all these different languages the crowd thought they were drunk. What is going on with these people? They are so excited that something has to be wrong. Then Peter stood up and began to preach. He said, "Listen, the spirit of God is among these people: women and men, rich



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and old, rich and poor are together dreaming dreams and having visions,” this very diverse group of people that day from very different backgrounds, very different perspectives. If you read the gospels they were arguing a lot throughout the time Jesus was teaching them. There were believers there and there were folks who were very skeptical but still welcomed to be part of the community and out of this rich diversity God formed a movement, empowered a movement. God saw the potential of this diverse group. God believed in the potential of this group.

Have you ever experienced someone really, really believing in you; someone believing in you so much that it might even carry you beyond what you believe for yourself, what you may have even thought was possible for yourself? I’m sure that when Diane introduces a new piece of music for the choir, especially when it’s a very difficult piece of music, I would guess that some of you, when you look at that piece of music, think there’s no way we’ll ever pull this one off – but someone believes in you, believes in you enough to say that yes – you can do this – and yes, we’ll work on this together and with the different voices and the different skill levels this will be able to be brought about because she believes in you.

I remember a time in my life when I was growing up and I felt called to Christian Ministry but knew I could not be a Baptist Minister because I knew I was gay and I didn’t have all the language around that way back then, but there came a point when I decided that I was going to apply for admission to university. No one on either side of my family had ever been to university so this was a new thing. It also meant that if I was to fulfill my dream it meant that my Dad and my Mum had to give up on their dream, for it was their dream that I, being the oldest, would take over the family business and in order for them to believe in me they had to give up on their dream. And so I was slightly determined back then too and I started to apply for university and I got a scholarship and my parents were so proud of me! Neither of them had ever gone to High School and I don’t think they even went to junior high school. My Dad, when he was a young teenager, had to go to work and Mum, as a young teenager, had to raise the family and worked as an assistant cook in a logging camp; and because junior and senior high school was so far away and they had to go away and board in order to attend school it was out of the question for either of their families because of finances. And here I was, graduating from high school and talking about going away to university. So I applied to universities and got a scholarship and got accepted and decided on Mount Allison University. I remember packing and getting ready to go and I remember my Dad driving me to Sackville, New Brunswick, and we arrived at the campus and people were buzzing around and we couldn’t find the place I was supposed to go to and my Dad decided we’d looked around enough and he said, “Okay. I’m going to stop here and we’re going to unpack on the sidewalk and you’ll find the place, you’ll be okay,” and literally we got out of the truck, took the suitcases out and he put them on the sidewalk and I think my Dad said to himself, “He might as well get used to this,” and I think he believed that I could do this – certainly much more than I did! I was ready to pick up the suitcases and put them back on the truck again and literally, when he was driving away, I was almost ready to yell out, “Stop!” but he believed in me, believed in me so much to get me through that first year when I didn’t even believe in myself! I remember standing there that first day and looking around the campus, not knowing anyone, not knowing the place. I’d never been there before and I remember feeling so out of place. How was I going to move the suitcases – not knowing where I was supposed to go – standing there and looking at all these ‘cool’ students walking around and here I was with my black pointed shoes and white socks and pant legs halfway up my ankles and just feeling I was dressed the wrong way, coming from the wrong place and not fitting in – and yet my Mum and my Dad believing in me and because of their believing in me I would persist and begin to fit in - and buy some new clothes - and eventually gaining a Bachelor of Science, Bachelor of Education, Masters of Divinity degree with honours and a Doctoral degree and neither of my parents went to high school, but because



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they believed in me I was able to do what I did. Later on my parents would be replaced by someone else who would nag me, for I'd had enough of university, thank you, and someone thought I should get a Masters degree and persisted in supporting me until it happened when I wanted to give up on that thesis – and then he felt I should get a doctoral degree – that I could do it and it would be good for me in the church and so literally he nagged me into it. I would never, never have done it on my own; but he believed in me and it carried me through.

John told me the story of Buckminster Fuller, an architect and an inventor, who early in his career lost his job. He had a two-year old child and he was desperate and was contemplating suicide. And then one day he stopped and looked over a body of water and was inspired to believe that he was here for a reason. He was inspired to believe that there was a purpose to his life and the purpose was to leave the world a better and more beautiful place; and so he believed in himself again and the geodesic dome came as a result as well as other inventions and architectural masterpieces as a result. So I'm asking you this morning, particularly if you may have given up on this place, I believe that as God believed in that early diverse group of people that the presence of God in this place is proof that God believes in us; that God believes in the power and potential of this widely diverse group of people to change the world. And I ask you this morning to believe in yourself again, because there was a time when you believed in yourself; you dreamed about being a pirate or a princess (much laughter!). Some of you....well, you know what I'm saying...There was a day when you believed in yourself, believed that you could accomplish almost anything. There was a day when you played dress-up – to be almost anything – and I would ask you on this day of Pentecost, when the presence of God was proof enough, that on this day of Pentecost that the presence of God among us would be proof enough to say that God believes in you, has placed you here for a reason to make the world a better place, a more beautiful place, a more just place for those who would come after you.

The scripture this morning says *as Peter stood before the crowd the presence of God has been given to these people. Your old will dream dreams; your young will have visions; women and men together dreaming what might be possible. Poor and rich together dreaming what might be possible.* That group went out and changed the world – and there were only one hundred and twenty of them! Might we do the same.

Amen.