

When the Feast of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Without warning there was a sound like a strong wind, gale force—no one could tell where it came from. It filled the whole building. Then, like a wildfire, the Holy Spirit spread through their ranks, and they started speaking in a number of different languages as the Spirit prompted them.

There were many Jews staying in Jerusalem just then, devout pilgrims from all over the world. When they heard the sound, they came on the run. Then when they heard, one after another, their own mother tongues being spoken, they were blown away! They couldn't for the life of them figure out what was going on, and kept saying, "Aren't these all Galileans? How come we're hearing them talk in our various mother tongues?"

Parthians, Medes, and Elamites; Visitors from Mesopotamia, Judea, and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene; Immigrants from Rome, both Jews and proselytes; Even Cretans and Arabs!

"They're speaking our languages, describing God's mighty works!"

Their heads were spinning; they couldn't make head or tail of any of it. They talked back and forth, confused: "What's going on here?" Others joked, "They're drunk on cheap wine." That's when Peter stood up and, backed by the other eleven, spoke out with bold urgency: "Fellow Jews, all of you who are visiting Jerusalem, listen carefully and get this story straight. These people aren't drunk as some of you suspect. They haven't had time to get drunk—it's only nine o'clock in the morning. This is what the prophet Joel announced would happen:

"In the Last Days," God says,

"I will pour out my Spirit

on every kind of people:

Your sons will prophesy,

also your daughters;

Your young men will see visions,

your old men dream dreams.

When the time comes,

I'll pour out my Spirit

On those who serve me, men and women both,

*and they'll prophesy.
I'll set wonders in the sky above
and signs on the earth below,
Blood and fire and billowing smoke,
the sun turning black and the moon blood-red,
Before the Day of the Lord arrives,
the Day tremendous and marvelous;
And whoever calls out for help
to me, God, will be saved."*

What a day! Pentecost, Pride Sunday and celebrating the 100th Anniversary of the United Church of Canada all on the same day! Wish me luck! Actually, the UCW will be leading a worship service next Sunday which will particularly focus on the UCC anniversary, so not as much pressure on that one.

I feel like there is a joke in here somewhere. Maybe Pentecostal Peter, a 100-year-old United Church member and a Queer person walk into a bar. ...

What would happen? Would a fight break out? Certainly, when you put any different religions or religious denominations together — heck, put folks from the same church in there and a fight could break out!

Do you remember the story of the guy who was rescued from a desert island after having been shipwrecked some years before? When rescuers arrived, there were three huts on the island, and they asked the man how many people lived there. The man said it was just him, and that one of the huts was his house and the other hut was his church. The rescuers asked what the third hut was, and the man replied, "Oh, that's the church I used to go to!"

That is partly why it is so miraculous that the United Church came into being 100 years ago, on Tuesday, June 10th, 1925. It was the first time in the world that different denominations came together and united. Especially from the time of the Protestant Reformation, churches started breaking off and splintering and breaking away from each other. In the Christian Church, division is more of a hallmark than unity.

The motto of the United Church of Canada is: "*Ut omnes unum sint.*" That's Latin for "**That all may be one,**" taken from John 17:21. It's a wonderful motto and sums

up so much of what the UCC was and is about. Though that motto can also get you into trouble. And frankly it *did* get the UCC into trouble, because unity can be understood as homogeneity — unity can be interpreted as ‘everybody needs to be the same: look the same, think the same, basically *be* the same.’ It can start to look like unity is achieved by getting people to be like us.

That’s a mistake the United Church of Canada made in its history. Part of our legacy was being a partner in the Residential School System and the cultural genocide of Indigenous people. And even beyond the Residential schools there was a sense—and this was part of the Government’s agenda too—that they wanted Canada to look a certain way — like “them”: white, Anglo-Saxon protestant. As John A. MacDonald put it, the goal was to take the “*Indian out of the child*.” And similarly other immigrants were encouraged to assimilate and become more “Canadian.” The United Church of Canada was part of that agenda. In the late 1800’s the railroad united the country geographically, and the move to unite the churches was partly a move to unite the country at a cultural level.

I am grateful that the United Church of Canada was able to see where they had gone wrong. They were able to see the incredible hurt and injustice placed on Indigenous people and offered a formal apology for its part (against legal advice) in 1986. The United Church also began to look at how they had been excluding other people and groups like the 2SLGBTQ+ community. By the grace of God, we have had the courage to open our eyes and to see where we failed, where we caused harm, and we have sought to live differently.

But we are living in a time when differences are not tolerated. Donald Trump has said he is conducting a ‘war on diversity.’ In particular Trump has targeted Trans people by doing things like no longer issuing passports in the person’s chosen gender — which can make travel dangerous in some cases. Trans people can no longer serve in the military. And they also removed public health data from federal government websites which included decades of HIV research and data on the mental health of LGBTQ+ youth.

One of the stories that emphasized the ridiculousness of this campaign was that as they were purging government websites of anything that referenced LGBTQ+ people, the history of the U.S. dropping the atomic bomb on Hiroshima was flagged to be removed because the plane that carried the bomb was named the

Enola Gay — which was the name of the pilot's mother!

Whenever you get a spike in fear and the rise of populist and fascist governments, there is always something that resembles a war on diversity. It probably all goes back to the cavemen—who knows why—but a fear of what is different seems to be part of our primitive brain. (Speaking of primitive brains and divisions — when two of the richest, most powerful like-minded men in the U.S. can't get along, you begin to understand how impossible it is to try to get society to be the same.)

As I mentioned, religions and churches are not immune to this fear and way of thinking. *But they should be immune!*

Churches and people who follow Jesus should be the first to reach out and love those who are different from us, because that's what Jesus did.

The ark of the gospel story moves from homogeneity to diversity.

The unity that Jesus talked about is *not* about being the same. Jesus could have chosen very like-minded disciples, but he didn't. He could have stuck to teaching and healing people like himself, but he didn't. He could have stayed close to home, but he didn't.

When it comes to following Jesus, unity is not uniformity. In fact, there is tremendous diversity.

Not only are we celebrating a big anniversary for the United Church of Canada, but today we celebrate the birthday of the whole Christian Church on the day of **Pentecost**.

On that day, the followers of Jesus were together. Tradition has it that they were in the Upper Room, the room where Jesus celebrated the last Passover meal and instituted the Last Supper. As they prayed, a sound "Like the rush of a violent wind" filled the room. The scripture says that tongues of fire appeared over them, and they were "Filled with the Holy Spirit." These ordinary, fearful followers of Jesus were filled with the glory of God, and with that, the church was born. It was an amazing day and display of the powerful and miraculous presence of God.

Pentecost could have just been for the disciples who had been through so much. It started inside—in that safe place where they had celebrated the last supper ... that safe place where they huddled after the crucifixion—but it was so powerful it led them outside. They began to speak in tongues—in other languages—and all of a

sudden people from all over understood them in their own mother tongue. This speaks to the diversity of God. Diversity of language, diversity of people. It was kind of wild — so much so that they were accused of being drunk! I mean, where's the uniformity and decorum?

Pride is a celebration of diversity. To those of you who identify as part of the 2SLGBTQ+ community, I am sorry that the church historically and even today has confused differences and diversity with being separate from God. Because ***difference is God's idea***. You just have to take a look at the natural world to see this. Diversity makes ecosystems stronger, and diversity makes the world stronger, more creative, and beautiful. Diversity is God's idea. You are God's idea, created in the image of God.

Whether you are wonderfully Queer or more vanilla in your flavour, remember that unity can be found without being the same. As Christians we can be free to be diverse and to express ourselves differently because we are united and anchored in Jesus. He is our North Star, our uniting point. So that means we can be free to love everyone. The Jesus movement from the start kept moving out.

Make your life more about planting seeds than pulling weeds. Let God worry about what is a weed. (Actually, the closer you follow, the more you realize the weeds are found more in your own heart than out there in that person or those people). Don't pull weeds: plant seeds of the love of Jesus, and you'll be amazed at the glorious garden that will grow.

I have a picture on my office wall called "The Point of Tranquility" painted by Morris Lewis.

(If you are reading the printed sermon in black and white this painting is a rainbow of different colours)



The real painting is huge. It's been well over a decade since I last saw it in real life at the Hirshorn Sculpture Garden in Washington DC. Lewis created the painting between 1959-1960 by pouring acrylic paint onto the canvas while rotating it, allowing the paint to bleed and create a flowing, almost floral effect. It's one of those paintings where you just want to sit on a bench in front of it for a long time and just be.

The Point of Tranquility. Tranquility refers to a state of calm, of peace, and of quiet. Tranquility is not a feeling that is abundant in the world right now, and we keep trying to find it. We try to find it in an exact place. (Maybe it's in that person right there — let's all be like that guy! Maybe it's in this political party or this ideology or this religion, but definitely not in *that* one— if we all think the same way we will find peace!) But when I look at this painting and try to find the point — is it in the middle? Is it on an edge? I realize that the Point of Tranquility is not a point at all. It's movement, it's flowing, its colour, its life, it's relationship.

This is a picture of Pentecost. When we follow Jesus into the heart of God, we can be filled with the life-giving power the Holy Spirit that is so wonderful it keeps moving beyond us, to bring life and healing and peace to the world.

Pentecostal Peter, a 100-year-old United Church member and a Queer person walk into a bar — let's get this party started! You can come too, everyone is welcome. Thanks be to God!

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