

Saturday we had a service giving thanks for the life of Bill Turner. As I learned more and more about him, he was indeed an exemplary gift to us all. Sunday we lit the Memorial Candle for him. We continue to hold Jean, Bob and Cindy and their families in our prayers.

This Sunday we will say goodbye to Judy Falconer. Please join us for the reception after the service. If you are able to bake or make finger sandwiches for the reception, please let Karen Hammond KHWriter@aol.com or Lori Wright nlnwright@gmail.com know.

The Pemaquid Peninsula CROP Walk is June 5 at 1:00 beginning from the Bristol Mills Congregational Church.

The Spring Meeting of the Midcoast Association UCC Sunday, May 22 at 2:00 at the Second Congregational Church, UCC, Newcastle. "Working Towards the Beloved Community in Maine: What is our part to play in 2016? The key note speaker will be Jerome Bennett who is the Disproportionate Minority Contact Coordinator for the State of Maine Department of Corrections. Jerome's past personal history, education and professional work drives his passion for addressing disparities in our juvenile and education systems. He will speak about his current work and ways our community can make a difference.

The Second Congregational Church of Newcastle and the Congregational Church of Bristol are hosting three soup suppers on three Wednesdays: May 25, June 1, and June 8 6:00-8:00 PM. The sessions will be: Dismantling Racism: Where do we start?; Racism in our past: How does it affect our present?; and What is White Privilege? This is part of the "Pentecost to Juneteenth Anti-Racism Challenge". The goal is to see if 50 churches in the Maine Conference UCC will take this time to reflect and act on our call to be the Beloved Community. I will not be able to attend the first, but I hope to be at the second and third.

GOSPEL John 14:8-17, 25-27
NEW TESTAMENT Acts 2:1-21

Steve Busch
Judy Falconer

MESSAGE

Pastor Beth Hood

If you have been watching the news this week, the footage from Fort McMurray in Alberta, Canada, is hellfire. A caravan of seven thousand souls in three thousand cars drives slowly through walls of fire shooting over a hundred feet into the air, charred tree trunks punctuating the scene, a carpet of small flames filling any chinks in the fire's walls while smoldering embers shoot onto the road, the cars. Thick smoke blankets the sky. Inside the cars, where the cameras are, people are sobbing. For miles, they drive past a ruined landscape, burnt out homes, trucks, shells of towns. The fire has consumed an area as large as Massachusetts. And it is predicted to grow.

It is the custom of the Church to celebrate the Day of Pentecost as a Fire Day, leaning into the description in Acts of the Spirit descending as in flames on the heads of people, and in tongues of foreign speech. In this, there is an echo of John the Baptist's promise, that he baptized with water but the One who was coming would baptize with fire.

But I think our friends to the north don't feel cheery about fire this Pentecost. No one will want to decorate the church with red paper flames, or whisper metaphors about spiritual conflagration. That is the warning given in all the lectionary resources this weekend.

It is fortunate that the scripture this year comes from John's Gospel, a very different description of the Spirit. Jesus himself describes the coming of the Spirit, in response to Philip's plea, "Lord, show us the Father, and we will be satisfied." And Jesus replies, "Do you still not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? It is God in me who does the works I do. And you who believe in me will do them, also, and I will do anything you ask, in my name. And you will receive another Advocate, to be with you forever, who will abide with you and be in you. I will not leave you orphaned," Jesus promises them all. "I am coming to you. Because I live, you also will live. On that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you." So Pentecost is not a celebration of special affects, but an awareness of Oneness. More enlightenment than spectacle.

The empowerment here is not represented by fire, nor by acquisition of powers. The image here is of presence. Jesus is not departing for a far away throne, where we may call upon him. Jesus is, instead, becoming part of us, as God is and has been part of him. And the Spirit, who will guide and remember all this, enhances this Oneness in which we, in faith abide.

John's image presses us to accept that God, whom we seek, is in us, with us, among us, and that the Spirit works in us Jesus' final gift, Peace.

But in the story from the Acts of the Apostles, it was anything but peaceful! It must have felt like creation all over again with wind and fire, and something new bursting forth. The amazing experience of speaking in one language but being understood by people of many different languages and lands. This morning we have heard the Lord's Prayer in Norwegian and the story of Pentecost in Spanish. In that moment, all the people were one in their hearing, if not their understanding of the deeper meaning of what they heard. Despite their differences, they could all hear what the disciples were saying, each in their own language.

God was doing a new thing that would transform the lives of all those present and far beyond, in time and place.

God had made himself known before in spectacular displays. But those occasions, like Moses on the mountaintop and Jesus transfigured were witnessed by a very few. On the birthday of a church called to spread to the ends of the earth, the display is for everyone. Not just the disciples, huddled in that upper room, not just the holiest or the most faithful or the most learned, not just the believers, not just those who were with Jesus on the road or witnesses to his Resurrection. At this moment, 'all flesh' male and female, old and young, slave and free, are not only included, but expected to prophesy and dream.

The same Spirit of God that fed the disciples on the road to Emmaus and inspired the tongues of those gathered in Jerusalem is inspiring a rebirth within us. It is the same Spirit that led Isaiah to envision a holy mountain for all people, or John to witness a city with no walls and no temple, that is breaking into our lives and sending us out as ambassadors of a renewed earth.

Like us today, the crowd was hungry for the word brought by the Spirit-filled disciples. We know from later verses that the church expanded from just over one hundred to three thousand in that one day.

The same Spirit that drew the little band of disciples out into the world also shaped them into a community. According to Marcus Borg, the Spirit on this Pentecost undoes what happened on the Tower of Babel as it brings back together the broken and divided community of humankind.

Borg's description of this Pentecost that up-ended the Tower of Babel story reminds us that the different languages of humankind have the power to divide people one from another. The Spirit of God has rushed in to empower many different kinds of people to do something astounding: communicate effectively with one another. Bridges were built and crossed in a moment, and the differences among them, instead of dividing, provided startling illustration of just how great the power of God is. Underneath the differences of nationality and language, there was a fundamental unity that was not only touched but enlivened and experienced deeply by many who were there.

That's how God works, that's how God prevails: by being present, even in hellfire, in the caravan of the frightened who are driving away from a once-beautiful, now devastated world they love, people who will find shelter in the arms of family and strangers on the other side of the fire.

Praying for rain, the great blessing of water, they will sing hymns to the Spirit, wondering if it can be true that God is with them in all this, and also knowing how it has been true, how they have seen God in so many faces in their hours of distress.

Mark Suriano, pastor of First Congregational UCC in Park Ridge, NJ, has written of Pentecost, "the first Pentecost may not be new birth, but rebirth, not a new covenant but a renewed covenant that would change the hearts and minds of the

disciples and renew the face of the earth.” I close with his blessing and a charge: “On Pentecost, may you find your heart singing with the spirit of God, your ears humming with the voice of the Spirit speaking in a language that reaches deep into your soul and wisdom dawning on your mind so that the shackles that have hardened around your mind may be broken, and God's voice and language set free. May your communities and churches experience the coming of God’s Spirit, anticipate it with joy and hope, give in to it with love, so that when the day is done all the world may know the love of God because of you!”