

May 31, 2006



Dear Friends,

When my last letter arrived on red paper, perhaps you were expecting it. Christmas is the season for exchanging cards, and newsy round-robin letters, and in a Christian community, joyous pastoral greetings which reflect on the wonder of Christ's birth. It is not so customary for us to exchange cards and letters for Pentecost, but I have decided that this is the other occasion in the

year when I shall write to you. Conveniently, Pentecost falls in May or June, so that my letters will be more-or-less evenly spaced at 6-month intervals, and the colour of Pentecost being red, it gives me an excuse to write again on this bonny red paper! More than that, though, Pentecost is the Birth-day of the Church. As we mark Christmas and our own Birthdays by receiving gifts and special mailings, Christmas

and the Church's Birthday are the times which mark the *two* Great Gifts which God sent us. Christmas, of course, marks God's gift of His Son, but Pentecost marks God's other gift – His Holy Spirit. Sometimes we forget about the Spirit. We make a big deal of Christmas and Easter – the Son's days – and rightly so, but the coming of the Holy Spirit is also an essential part of God's salvation plan. Without the coming of the Holy Spirit, Christ's resurrection would have remained an objective event in history, but it would not have been a power made real in your life and in mine. There would not have been *fruit*. There would not have been *harvest*. That is the Spirit's work – to make Christ's achievement our possession – to make Christ's work *fruitful* among his people.

One of my keenest delights this Spring has been watching the fruit of my fall planting emerge from the ground. I have had blooms in the daffodil patch and a beautiful display from the crabapples. There has been robust growth in the iris plot, which is just now coming into flower, and the daylilies and clematis vines promise further rewards later in the summer. The perennials bought at the church's plant sale are taking a firm hold, and I may even have a small crop of berries to garnish with my rapidly spreading mint! It is truly amazing how things grow – what hard workers those scrubby little rhizomes have turned out to be, and what varied stages things go through, as they pursue from bud, to flower to mature fruit, the individual destiny engraven upon the genetic code of each of them.

I believe that in the church, this season of Pentecost, which begins over the summer, should not be a season of dormancy. It should be our growing season – our time of fruit-bearing. It is perhaps right that the groups which work so hard from September to June should take a few months off from their usual activity and round of meetings. And I appreciate that those who go to the cottage for the June-through-August stretch, are important to the other communities to which they go. In Nova Scotia, our churches used to be on the receiving end of the cottage influx and we certainly did enjoy seeing those people for those three months, year after year. What I am resistant to, is not a kind of change in the church's programme which allows some very committed people to get a well-earned break, nor the idea that for a few months we must share some of our people with other Christian communities. It is the idea that in the summer the church in some sense stops, shuts down, goes into the off-season. Whence comes this impression? There is no dormant period for God. "The God who keeps Israel neither slumbers nor sleeps" (Psalm 121. 3-4). God does not place our June prayers in a queue and get back to us in September. God sends the Holy Spirit at Pentecost and so signals a time of ferment, a season of growth, such as the world had never seen. God does not have an off-season, so I don't believe his church should either.

We must think creatively about the summer so that we can exploit the different opportunities it gives us to fulfill what is our constant mandate as the church: to glorify God and to introduce people, savingly and transformingly, to Jesus Christ. Pentecost is a time when the Spirit was poured out on all flesh, when everyone, from the old men to the young daughters, dreamed dreams and saw visions (Acts 2: 17-18). What is *your vision* for what we might do with the summer months around Westminster-St. Paul's? What new blooms might we show forth in this season of change, and so

delight the Heavenly Gardener? (This is not a rhetorical question. If you have ideas, speak to me. Speak to one of the elders.) *My* vision, in very general terms, is that the summer should be a time when we shift gears – do different things – perhaps see different people organizing the activities – so that we don't just end up in September feeling exhausted. Summer should be a time of perhaps greater informality, greater God-glorifying fun as a church family. One personal desideratum (says she after 6 years in the zero-humidity summers of Scotland!) is that we utilize the air-conditioned space in the new addition for worship when the sanctuary becomes too stifling. (Perhaps the humidity factor is keeping away *other* heat-sensitive souls like me). Another wish is that some form of child care – not a full-scale Sunday school, but something requiring perhaps two adults on standby – be available. Otherwise, I think the message we send to young families during these summer months is one of un-welcome.

In a number of ways I would like to send the message, first of all to you, and secondly to the community around us, that over the summer, Westminster-St. Paul's will not be shutting down. The first part of this, I think, has to do with maintaining a pastoral and administrative presence around the church. Margaret will be working 6 hours per week during the summer, but will be arranging those hours as 3 mornings from 10-12. Our hope is to have volunteer coverage for the fourth 2-hour morning, so that we can maintain an administrative presence in the church four mornings a week, as we do throughout the rest of the year. I will normally be arranging my five weeks of holiday so as to take a maximum of two weeks together, during the months of July and August. Currently I am thinking the week of July 16th and the week either preceding or following. (My first thought was to go visit Dad in Calgary during the Stampede, but as I have not yet done any great exploration of the local area, I think for this year I shall be staying closer to home. Perhaps Mum will come up and we can take in a few shows at the Stratford and the Shaw). If summer in your family is anything like it was in mine, it involves lots of visiting relatives, big family barbecues and picnics. It has been wonderful over the past few weeks to meet some of your visiting family members and friends at worship. I would encourage you to make church part of what you share with your visitors when they are here with you. With a full parking lot and someone here to pick up the phone when folk call, I think we can begin to get the message out to the community around us that Westminster-St. Paul's is still open for business.

I think I came to an appreciation of Christmas and Easter much earlier than I did of Pentecost. Yet I chose Pentecost 2004 as my day of ordination because it had been growing on me for some time what an important occasion Pentecost is, how central its gift of the Holy Spirit is to our very being as the Church, and to any fruitfulness we shall have in ministry. I am looking forward to exploring the book of Acts with you, a book celebrating the work of the Holy Spirit and the first growth-spurt of the church in the days following the first Pentecost. I am looking forward to what the Holy Spirit will do in our midst, as we become more aware of Him and pay attention to His work. This same Spirit will inspire new visions and new dreams in *us*, I'm sure, beginning even this summer.