



Dear Friends,

What does it look like when the Holy Spirit begins to move within a church? Pentecostals and other charismatics have shown us some of the more unusual phenomena that can happen: people begin speaking in strange tongues or falling down 'slain in the Spirit.' Those who experienced the 'Toronto blessing' were often overwhelmed with a sense of joy and the urge to laugh uncontrollably. These phenomena may be important for the individuals they affect, but it is hard to see how the kingdom of God is much advanced by an unintelligible church, an unconscious church, or a church with a case of the giggles! Those who have known the work of the

Holy Spirit, in all its fullness, are those who have been moved from experience to renewed obedience, from experience to the formation of mature Christian character, and from the inwardness of experience, to an upward-looking which focuses on God, and an outward-looking which focuses on others. Presbyterians have always emphasized the unity of the Spirit and the Word. What does it look like when the Holy Spirit begins to move within a Presbyterian church? It mostly, I think, looks like people hearing the Word of God and doing it.

One of the things I did during my recent holiday in Scotland, was worship in the church I used to attend from 2001-2004. In the three years since my last visit, God has renewed that church through an outpouring of the Spirit. This is what it looks like on them. They were always deeply committed to prayer, to seeking God in His Word and to missions, but on this visit there was something new: the air was crackling with Spirit-life. The 'old congregation' was engulfed in a sea of new young faces, and the old and the new members were worshipping God *together*. (*Unity* is one of the great hallmarks of the Holy Spirit). There was a *freedom* which was also new. In the coffee hour afterwards, people were unselfconscious about loving one another and sharing with one another deeply, even when conversation entered into matters of faith. I noticed one of the city-centre street people, and an individual who was clearly trans-gender, there in the midst, and marveled that the Spirit had given this congregation – straight-laced as I knew them to be – the freedom and the *grace* to welcome each and *every* child of God. The congregation itself was aware that something was afoot, that the Spirit was stirring them to new life, and had shaken down into their lap, a windfall of blessings. The buzz was about what God was calling them to do next – into what particular field the Great Commission was calling them now to go. The Spirit had given them a great sense of *confidence*, grounded not in themselves but in their living, working Lord. What loomed large were not the obstacles and objections but the vision of possibility.

Could it happen here? I believe that a great season of possibility lies ahead for us at Westminster-St. Paul's during these coming days of Pentecost. It will start in June with a venture, co-ordinated by the Outreach Committee, in which our church, through its members, will extend a personal invitation to the folk living in our neighbourhood, to come and check us out. Almost 2000 newer homes lie in the area between Auden and Watson, Eastview and Grange. We would like to visit as many of them as we can. Hopefully we will see a good response – that would be exciting – but just as important, I think, is the special thing, which I believe will happen *in us* when we slay the giant of our fears and put shoes to pavement in our Lord's name (Ephesians 6: 15).

Also in June – June 24th to be exact – there will be an opportunity for us to take part in another outreach ministry. During Advent we regularly take up a collection of clothing and other items for Evangel Hall, a mission of the Presbyterian Church in Canada to Toronto's homeless. On the fourth Sunday of June, we're going to have a chance to see the new Evangel Hall facility, to share a meal with its patrons, and to lead them in worship. It is wonderful to have a home-base from which to do mission and ministry, namely our building at 206 Victoria Road, but I'm convinced that we shall feel the winds of God's Spirit in a whole new way when we put out from our harbour, into the open sea – when *we* go out, in other words, meeting folk on *their* turf.

VBS is another of the great possibilities looming on our horizon. Vacation Bible School was one of the very good things which happened last year. It was blessed by a team of dedicated volunteers and 25 congenial children which the Spirit blew our way at the last minute. I think all had fun, but for some,

the child's love of Jesus was genuinely awakened or fed. This is what it's all about. This is what we pray for and why a bunch of otherwise sane people will stay at the church painting scenery till midnight, or will embark upon the production of cookies in industrial quantities. VBS is coming earlier than usual this year, during the week of July 16th-20th. We pray for volunteers; we pray for kids; we pray for the Spirit to give the venture Life. (Incidentally, your minister will be taking her final week of holidays from July 22-28 to recover from VBS-fatigue!)

VBS is one of the things we want to invite the neighbourhood *to* – one of the 'drawing cards' we will mention during the home visitation in June. VBS is aimed at families with children. The second 'drawing card' has adults in view. It is a course designed to present Christianity in outline, for those who are curious about life's biggest questions. At the moment we are looking at the Alpha Course and considering joining the city-wide Alpha initiative which is taking place this Fall (September 23 to November 25) here in Guelph. Alpha has proved an instrument of the Spirit's transformation in so many churches, but whether it is Alpha or some other programme covering the Christian basics, great things can happen when the faith is simply taught with clarity and conviction. The Bible calls the Spirit the "guide into all truth" (John 16.13), so when we present the faith in that way, we can expect the Spirit's ministry alongside us, guiding the message home, so that it reaches its mark in people's minds and hearts.

Part of the Spirit's work in that Scottish congregation I mentioned, was in bringing new people, first to worship, and then to faith. But there were signs of growth and renewal – of the Spirit's work and blessing – also among the membership of long-standing. We who have been walking with God these many years, need the ministry of the Holy Spirit too, and we sometimes need to create the occasions for it to take place. Those of you who know the Crieff Hills Retreat Centre understand that it's a special place, where Presbyterians, and others, go apart to receive the Spirit's ministry – through fellowship, through hospitality, through the spiritual disciplines of prayer and reflection on Scripture, through the kind of study that inspires. F.I.S.H – the Fellowship, Inspiration, Spirituality & Hospitality committee at WSP – has arranged for us to have a congregational retreat day on September 15th at Crieff.

"Congregational" means that this retreat is for the *whole* congregation – for everybody who comes to church. It is our church-family's "away day," a time to "retreat" from the other stresses that are on us, and to enjoy just being with God and one another. The theme for the day will be 'a fruitful life'. Gerry Hofstra and I will be presenting some thoughts on this theme, and there will be a co-ordinating programme for children. Again, this is one of those opportunities I see on the upcoming calendar for God's Spirit to do work in us, and to deepen, in Christ, the ways we already know and serve one another. I pray it will be well supported.

As I mentioned last year, I believe Pentecost is meant as the church's growing season – a time of life and fruit and flower – not a season of dormancy when the church "shuts down." Summertime in my garden suggests this as well as my reading of the Bible. I was quite shocked to see the growth in the garden upon my return from Scotland. The rhubarb seems to have been on steroids, and there is the promise of abundant raspberries and crabapples on the now mature wood. What fruit does the Spirit of God promise? Galatians 5.22-23 says the fruit of the Spirit is "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control." Summer sermons will explore this fruit-basket. Again I look forward to seeing who the summer months will bring us: visitors from your extended families, old friends who are back in town.... I pray God will use this time, the weekly worship and the special programmes we are planning, to bear good fruit in us. What does it look like when the Holy Spirit moves within a church? We're told that on the first day of Pentecost their young men saw visions



and their old men dreamt dreams (Acts 2.17). They saw the possibilities. They scanned the ground Christ had sown, with confident hope. But in the days after that, Acts tells how the Spirit turned possibilities into actualities for the church – turned seeds into fruit. May it be so with us. God grant that our summer be Spirit-ed and fruity!

Karla
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