

First Mennonite Church Edmonton

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We all love stories. As children we are taught that stories are special. I have fond memories of going to bed having been read a story by mom or dad. My nephews before bed love to have a story or three read to them. Even as adults we love stories. Whether it is reading them in a book, or listening to them through as an audio book, or even watching them come to life on television we surround ourselves with stories. Stories whatever format they come in, continue to enthrall us. There's something about a story that commands our attention. I can always tell if a story that I'm telling is connecting, you're all become quiet in a very different way.

In the church we share a particular kind of story. Through words and actions we share the story of God at work in our lives and in the world. Sometimes we do this pretty obviously and intentionally. For example this morning we had the particular privilege to listen to and receive the gift of Lauren and Andrew's faith stories. More often than naught it's subtly shared. Sometimes by our actions, sometimes it's during the Joys and Concerns, or sometimes in a foyer conversation.

In the Christian life, one of the spiritual practices we have is called testimony. Testimony is the sharing of our personal faith story with one another. A witnessing to the work of God in our lives. I think it's safe to say that this is a spiritual practice that we could, I think, practice a bit more. However, our humility often gets the better of us. I've heard people comment, when thinking about their faith story, that it's nothing exciting. For some their testimony is mundane, they never had a mountain top experience, for others their testimony is does have that moment. Whether your story is exciting or mundane isn't the point of the story for me. The point of Testimony is the sharing. The special thing about Testimony is that it's your story. Each person's testimony is *their* story, each person's testimony is *their* experience of the Creator of the Universe, the Risen Christ, and the life giving Holy Spirit. That's what's special about Testimony for me.

I think that Pentecost Sunday is a good day for us to reflect on Testimony. The part that wasn't read this morning was Peter's Testimony. After defending the other disciples and himself from accusations of early morning drunkenness, Peter goes on to share with the crowd his experience of Jesus, and this story had an impact.

On Pentecost Sunday God worked two miracles. The first, the one that we're most familiar with, was God sending the Holy Spirit to the Disciples and gifting them the ability to speak in a multitude of tongues. To speak in languages that would be understood to all who were present in Jerusalem at that time; languages that they, the disciples, may have heard, but most likely have never spoken before. God emboldened Peter and the other disciples too share their story of encountering, embracing and embodying Jesus.

The second miracle, perhaps the more important miracle, which God worked, was the opening of the ears of those present. Testimony requires not just a voice to speak but ears to hear that which is being witnessed. God was also at work opening the ears of those gathered. And when Peter and the other disciples spoke, the ears of the crowd heard what was being said. And when Peter witnessed to what he had experienced in Jesus of Nazareth, Jesus the Christ, people listened.

The miracles of God on Pentecost Sunday brought clarity from confusion. A reversal of Babel, if you will. Where the voices of humankind were confused, now at Pentecost, by the gift of the

Holy Spirit, Babel is reversed. Through the Holy Spirit we are gifted to both speak and listen to one another.

As a witnessing community ourselves, we have many voices, and we have many stories and testimonies. I said it earlier, each of us have our own stories of encountering, embracing, and embodying God and Christ.

Through stories, we can share one another's grief, understand one another's fears, lament injustices, we can celebrate with one another, we can value different perspectives, and gulfs of opinion can be appreciated, and perhaps even overcome. For in story, we all speak the language of humanity.

And in sharing our testimony, we are shaped, and so is the community. Transformed from just a community into a witnessing community, a community that shares and listens to each other's experience of God. A community where God is witnessed to one another and to the world. And we are transformed, into a witnessing and listening people of God.

This morning we've had the privilege to listen to and to receive the gift of Lauren and Andrew's stories. In reflecting on their particular faith journey they have both challenged and encouraged us in our own faith journey. By bearing witness to God's work in their life, they have challenged us to reflect on where and how we have experienced God at work in our lives. This is a prime example of what it means for us to embody the theme of the Mennonite Church Canada Assembly, declaring what we have seen and heard.

Personal Stories have incredible power. More than works of fiction, there's something about the sharing of personal stories that command our attention. They speak to our shared humanity, our struggles, our loves, our triumphs, our losses. They are precious, and they demand that we treat them with care. Stories remind us of those things which we hold in common, and highlight our commonalities, rather than highlighting our differences.

Through the sharing of our testimony God works two miracles through the Holy Spirit. Each time a testimony is shared the two miracles of Pentecost are repeated. The miracle of speech, and the miracle of listening. Two powerful miracles made possible by the arrival, presence and power of the Holy Spirit. Thanks be to God.

Amen