

MVLP Gather Round E-News - Issue #20

May 30, 2020

This is the twentieth issue of our E-newsletter, “Gather ‘Round,” to call us together through the internet to share news and needs and stories with each other. If you have a tale to tell or a perspective to share, please send it on for the next issue!

The Buildings Are Closed; The Church Is Open!

Back issues of “Gather ‘Round” E-news are available on the Moosup Valley Church website, thanks to our webmaster, Pat Safstrom.

Go to moosupvalley.church and click on the tab at the top of the page.

Call for Stories about Mt. Vernon

We have enjoyed learning about the Rice City Christian Church. Now, let’s share some about Mt. Vernon Baptist. Sonja is summarizing the history, and Janice Reynolds has sent me a wonderful piece about her childhood memories of Mt. Vernon. There also was a Mt. Vernon village, I believe, with a tavern. Does anyone have a story about that?

Mt. Vernon Streams Sunday Service

Worship Sunday, May 31, will be on the MVLP Facebook Live page, streaming from the Moosup Valley Church at 12:30 p.m. The service will be about Pentecost: “If God Is with Us.” The Order of Worship is attached. To log in, go to: <https://www.facebook.com/MVLPspirit/?ref=bookmrks>).

About Pentecost, Pastor Bob writes, “Pentecost is the Jewish Celebration of Shavuot, the blessings of the Wheat Harvest and the Commemoration of the day God gave the Torah through Moses to the Israelites. It is the Christian Celebration of the day that God shared God’s Holy Spirit with all who would believe! Our Live Stream Worship will celebrate the sharing of the Holy Spirit and what a difference it makes in our lives. Many churches wear red on Pentecost to symbolize the tongues of fire that rested on all the believers. If you are joining us for worship, it would be good for you to meditate beforehand on Romans 8:26-39, and then please read on through verse 39 and the well-known passages, 31b “If God is for us, who can be against us?” And vs. 38-39, “For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

New! Evening Prayer

Beginning the first Wednesday in June (THIS Wednesday), Rev. Betsy will begin offering Evening Prayer, Vespers, by Zoom, a brief (20 minute) time of scripture, song, meditation and prayer at 7:00 p.m., a time to give thanks for the day just past and praise to God. If you would like to participate by reading or singing, please let me know, and I will send you the materials. In any event, everyone is welcome to come and listen. Please bring a candle. We will join in the beloved ancient prayer, “Keep watch, dear Lord, with those who work or watch or weep this night, and give your angels charge over those who sleep. Tend the sick, Lord Christ, give rest to the weary, bless the dying, soothe the suffering, pity the afflicted, shield the joyous, and all for your love’s sake. Amen.” It will be acceptable to come in your PJs! Here is the link:

Betsy Garland is inviting you to a scheduled Zoom meeting.

Topic: Evening Prayer

Time: This is a recurring meeting: Every Wednesday at 7:00 p.m.

Join Zoom Meeting

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/4971608531?pwd=cVJIUmw1QndYcmtiakhDVjVmWDA2UT09>

Meeting ID: 497 160 8531

Password: 038040

Telephone if you need it: +19292056099

Special Online Hymn Sing

Pastor Bob writes, “June 14 is our normal Hymn Sing Day at Mount Vernon. We cannot, as of yet, gather safely together, but we will have Hymn Sing nonetheless. Please send Pastor Bob (RevBobH@gmail.com) one of your favorite hymns (and a story of why it is your favorite if you would like), and I will give it to Doug. Doug will play for us, and at home we can all sing to our heart’s content. By then, the Governor will allow gatherings of 15 or less, so if you have 15 people that you are safe with, join together and have a Hymn Sing in your back yard as Doug plays for us all! Or from the solace of your living room, or the sanctuary of your Nursing Home Room, or the Refuge of your Quarantine Space, sing out as loud as you want! It will do all our hearts good to sing (virtually) together!”

Rev. Betsy Reflects on Pentecost: When Did the Holy Spirit Come?

Read Acts 2:1-21

Growing up in Sunday School, we learned that the Holy Spirit descended on the disciples and all those gathered in Jerusalem on that first Pentecost. Remember the violent wind and the tongues of fire? But was that the way it really was? Was Pentecost a real, historical event or simply a beloved story – one of many – marking the birthday of the church? Recent scholars tell us that Luke, who not only wrote his gospel story about the life of Jesus, but also wrote Acts early in the second century, the story of what happened to Jesus’ followers after the resurrection. It was Luke who created this wind and fire not-very-historical story to prove that the rapid expansion of the Jesus Movement across the known world was God’s doing. And we know it as “Pentecost,” because Luke stages it

in Jerusalem when Jews from all over the world were there, hence the profusion of languages, for the Jewish agricultural festival of Pentecost, and he gives his story credibility by building on the ancient prophecy of the prophet Joel.

And where had the Spirit been before then? In our morning Bible Study sessions, we have been reading all the Pentecost scriptures and recognizing that the Holy Spirit has been here all along. The complex Hebrew noun *ruah* can be translated as “wind,” “breath,” or Spirit,” and our differing biblical translations have chosen one of these three possible options as most appropriate for each context. So in Genesis 1:2, what is it that comes from God to sweep over the waters? In Genesis 2:7, what does God give to the creature of the dust that it may become a human? In Psalm 104, we have understood the Spirit of God granting life to the whole creation. Thus, on Pentecost Sunday, we might think of God’s power resting not only on us as individuals and on our churches but also throughout the cosmos, burning with divine mystery and calling us to witness to God’s *ruah*, in our midst and breaking down artificial barriers of speech, class, and nation that separate us from each other and God’s blessings for all of creation.

Special Prayers: Please hold in your heart and prayers...

- Carl’s cousin, the Rev. Mindy Reed, had her surgery for Atrial fibrillation, and it went very well, and her partner, Ann Cilma, who is going in for cataract surgery and possible corneal transplant in June.
- Joan Lacerda on the death of her mother this week, of whom Joan says, “She was a very independent woman with a wonderful sense of humor, a friendly smile, and literally would give you the shirt off her back if you needed it. She surely will be missed.” Prayer also for Pat Safstrom for whom Joan’s mother was like a second mother to her when they were growing up.
- Joanne is home and continues her slow but steady progress in healing from brain surgery. She sounds like herself on the phone and still has her sense of humor!
- Phyllis Dexter is planning to have a stent put in on Wednesday and hopes to have more strength and energy after that procedure.
- Janice Reynolds is in need of healing and strength in her legs.
- Everyone in the Sroka family has been retested for COVID-19 following their recovery. Jane has tested negative twice, but Ronnie and Randy are still testing positive – which the doctor thinks is because they are shedding old cells slowly.
- For Beverly’s Aunt Helen who has fallen and broken a leg in her assisted living facility.

An Unlikely Pentecost Story

I ran across this story recently about a relationship between the Irish in the Potato Famine, which raged from 1845 to 1849, exacerbated by English agricultural policies, and Native Americans, whose lands were stolen and who knew what it was like to be stripped of their farms and fishing grounds and livestock and forced-marched to strange lands not fit for farming or fishing. A story about then and now. And it seems to me an unlikely Pentecost story because of unspoken understanding.

It begins in Ireland with the generations-old conflict between the British Northern Ireland and the Irish Republic to the south. There had been hopeless blood-letting for decades, but it erupted into war on so-called Bloody Sunday in 1969, but most historians recognized that the roots of the conflict, much more than a war between Protestants and Catholics, were economic and cultural. And about the same time as the Potato Famine in Ireland, in which it is estimated more than a million men, women and children starved to death, people of color and Native Americans in the United States knew what it was like to be ruled under the thumb of others, and they took pity on the Irish.

In 1847, the Choctaw Indians had suffered as much as any. Then, practically penniless themselves, they scraped together \$170 and sent it to Ireland. The Irish remembered, and today, as the Navajo Nation (including some Choctaw) die from coronavirus infection on their reservation, at one of the highest rates in the country, an Irish charity has raised \$3 million for the 3,500 American Indian families there, with \$100 packages of supplies arriving every day. One hundred seventy-three years later. Understanding born of suffering and oppression. The power of God's Spirit reaching across oceans and cultures and centuries, a modern-day Pentecost. *—Based on a story in the Cape Cod Times, "If you give, just wait. It comes back," written by Dan McCullough, a former Rhode Islander.*

Gather 'Round for Bible Study

Both Rev. Betsy and Pastor Bob are leading Bible Study. Here's how to participate:

Psalms: Tuesday & Friday mornings at 10:00 a.m. with Betsy, reading and discussing selected psalms and the Pentecost scriptures by Zoom. Contact BetsyAldrichGarland@gmail.com.

Philippians: The Rice City Bible Study has finished the Gospel of John and decided to focus on Paul's letter to the Philippians. They have discovered that an old fashioned teleconference works just as well for them. Wednesday evenings at 6:30 p.m. with Bob by telephone. (Send Bob your phone number, and he will call you.)

Window on Wildlife

As I am sure you have noticed, there is a great deal of activity among the birds now. As trees leaf out, many are now building nests which will be camouflaged from predators. Bushes and shrubs are favorite nesting sites, as well. Depending upon your patience (some would say boredom) you can locate nests by paying attention to the "bird

traffic" around your house. Sitting quietly where you can survey the surrounding trees and bushes, pay attention to vegetation that seems to have a particular species of bird entering and exiting regularly. Right now there is nest-building and egg-laying happening. Then it will be quiet for a bit while the eggs are incubated and then both parents will be busy feeding hungry mouths.

An interesting activity is putting out nesting materials. If you have yarn, hair, thread, twine, etc., cut it into lengths from an inch or 2 to 6-8 inches, unravel the strands and offer it to the birds. I use jute, soak it so it unravels somewhat and then I separate the fibers, draping it on the yew in front of my window. The orioles are very busy right now gathering the strands. Other birds like soft fibers and cotton-like material.

Unobtrusively, you can locate nests by checking the bush or tree with the traffic. However, do not become a pest, for the birds may abandon the location. Just the ordinary use of our yard discouraged the bluebirds who started to build a nest near our house. After the babies hatch, you can keep track of growth but be careful not to approach when they are close to fledging (leaving the nest) for they may panic, try to fly away unsuccessfully and be on the ground. Then they are totally vulnerable and will probably perish.

Although we are all eager to get back to some form of "normalcy," we are blessed in Foster to be able to stop and watch God's creations right in our own yards. Look closely at the tree as it goes from buds to flowers to leaves. Watch the growth of plants you set out, paying attention to the details of its development. Observe animal activity and rituals. Instead of allowing yourself to become frustrated and depressed, embrace this slow-down as a time to bask in the luxuriousness of our beautiful environment and its creatures. As you observe closely over the next weeks and months, paying attention to the small details, your experiences will be the equivalent of a course in environmental studies and it will be free!

Closing Reflection

The first Memorial Day (originally Decoration Day) took place on May 30, 1868, more than 150 years ago today, to commemorate the sacrifices of Civil War soldiers. One of my professors, Father Henri J. M. Nouwen, known by contemporaries as "the spiritual writer who most influenced our generation," wrote this prayer for Memorial Day, and it rings true today, in the suffering we see around us due to COVID-19, environmental devastation, violence and poverty.

Dear God,
with you everything is possible.
Let the cup of war,
killing and destruction,
the cup of bloodshed,

human anguish and desolation,
the cup of torture,
breakage in human relationships and abandonment...

Dear God,

Let this cup pass us by.

We are afraid.

We are trembling in the depths of our being.

We feel the sweat and tears

of thousands of people all over the world,

people who are afraid—

afraid to fight,

afraid to kill,

afraid of being killed,

afraid of an uncertain future.

Amen. —*Henri J.M. Nouwen*

Offerings may be mailed for:

Mt. Vernon to Ron Allen (116 Barbs Hill Road, Greene, RI 02827),

Moosup Valley to Pat Safstrom (76 Moosup Valley Road, Foster, RI 02825),

Rice City to Phyllis Dexter (53 Moosup Valley Road, Foster, RI 02825).

Mt. Vernon Larger Parish to Scott Knox (150 Foster Ctr. Rd., Foster, RI 02825)

Reverend Betsy can be reached at BetsyAldrichGarland@gmail.com or 401-463-8697.

Pastor Bob can be reached at revbobh@gmail.com or 401-440-7831.

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