

## **Congregate!**

Sermon on Acts 2:1-5

Sunday February 1, 2009

Trinity United, Ottawa

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One day last Fall, I stood in the Trinity parking lot with one of you and we marvelled at how a couple of the trees up there were alive with little birds - hundreds of chirping, fluttering creatures, buzzing like a hive. Humming with excitement, all together. They were like vibrating leaves on the bare branches. I wondered what was happening. But of course! They were gathering to fly south as a flock. Congregating - poised to make the next great annual journey.

Recently, that remembered image carried me to an image of our church singing together. Congregating. All together in one place. Humming with energy, as if ready to move 'as one' on the winds of the Spirit. Poised to take advantage of the 'collective airlift' of community, to follow this season's God-winds.

The Christian tradition celebrates the birth of the church on Pentecost, 50 days after Easter, when events occurred which Luke describes in the Book of Acts like this: "When the day of Pentecost had come, they were *all together in one place*...a sound like the rush of a wind filled the place...All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit...as the Spirit gave them abilities." That is how the early Christian church took off into the wider Mediterranean world.

Lately, I've felt like that Trinity is poised for a take off, Spirit-ready for our next journey. Clearly, today is not Pentecost, but it is our Annual Meeting. Today, we congregate as Trinity, *all together in one place*, to check in with ourselves as church. And perhaps I'm drawn to the imagery and events of Pentecost, because lately, I've had a feeling that Trinity United Church is being gifted and getting ready to move with the Spirit towards something new.

Are we on the verge of our next incarnation as Christ community? Spirit energy is gathering here. Gifts for preaching and teaching, discernment and daring compassion, are manifesting in new ways, among us. And perhaps for the first time since I came here, Trinity feels like we are indeed "*all together in one place*."

At our last 'Emerging Spirit' United Church workshop, titled "Living the Hope" the Pentecost scripture story of the birth of the church was lifted up to evoke and

energize our hope for the church today. Particular attention was paid to the original Greek word that comes to us rather blandly translated as “*all together in one place*”. ‘Homothumadon’. That peculiar Greek word is used 11 times in the Book of Acts to describe Christian community. Anybody guess its meaning? (Hint: it has nothing to do with homosexuality or lobster thermidor!)

Homothumadon, is a compound of two greek words meaning “to rush along” and “in unison.” It is sometimes translated in the Bible as “with one mind, with one accord, with one passion.” Church, as it was born to be on Pentecost, is a congregation of humans rushing passionately along, of one mind and one accord - to follow Jesus’ way.

Can you see us as that flock of birds, poised for the next migration? Collectively trusting where they are meant to go. I don’t know our destination yet. Is the Spirit whispering a new direction to one of you?

Church, our congregation, is so much more than just passively gathered together worshipping and waiting. We are listening deeply for the Spirit’s direction, our intentions generating Spirit-power like a windmill. We are a flock of birds flapping our wings, poised to move on the Spirit’s wind - in Jesus’ wake.

We are poised, collectively, to go where our deepening familiarity with Jesus leads us. Our Jesus book study group is really cooking. We are practising our praying and meditating, to follow his model of a God-centred, God-grounded daily life. We are recognizing and receiving among us the many and varied gifts of the Holy Spirit given to our congregation - gifts given to each of us to energize this community for our next sacred flight.

Can you see how Trinity is poised now to fly on Spirit wing - truly together following Jesus’ direction for living justice and compassion?

Our numbers are gathering again, significantly because we are growing in passion and commitment. At the Living the Hope event, we heard that churches wanting to emerge into this 21<sup>st</sup> century must do what Trinity has already done. Receive people as they come to us, where they are at on their spiritual journey, and offer them what they want most: belonging.

The ‘earlier church’ - the traditional Christian congregation some of us grew up in, insisted that people conform to certain dogmatic beliefs, and behave according to

community norms, in order to belong. Like this: **Believe - Behave - Belong**. Today's Emerging Spirit churches, like Trinity, recognize that belonging is what people today are consciously seeking. People come looking for that 'third place' in their life, besides home and work, where they can belong, relate, contribute and be appreciated. In today's postmodern society "Togetherness is a rare, precious and elusive experience." So we have reversed the order of the three B's, to open our doors to the spiritual seekers. **Belong - Behave - Believe**. We welcome people with Jesus' message of inclusivity: If you are here, then you belong. You are welcome at our table - entitled to share the bread.

It is no an accident that our 'membership group', our 'newcomers welcoming group', is called "What in the World Do We Believe?" A question. Not an answer. An invitation to explore and experiment with what it means personally to be Christian in this Christian community. Those who enter here do not encounter exclusive membership requirements. Instead we are becoming what Marcus Borg calls a 'community of transformation.'

We who are Trinity today recognize that it is through the safety of belonging that new behaviours are adopted - spiritual practices explored and social actions risked. And it is out of the practice and action of new behaviours and experiences in community, that people test and discover what they really believe. Hopefully they find out what they can believe in so passionately, that they will fly with us.

Through the action of the Spirit, may the warmth of belonging here , and the freedom to participate in this community continue to draw more hungry birds to the bread of Christ we share in our congregation.

May we all recognize and reinforce the energy of unity that is happening here of late, as we sing together in unison, poised all together, with excitement and anticipation, for the next wing of our journey.

Homothumadon. Ready your Spirit wings, Trinity! Congregate!  
May it be a Christ led flight!

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