

Pentecost SUNDAY May 24, 2026 “The Other Side of the Boat”**Psalm 119-- Part 3 Refrain 5 839-840 VU****♪ *Your word is a lamp for my feet and a light for my path.* ♪****Acts 2: 1-21 Hebrews 11 to 12:1-3 John 21: 1-14**

Thank you to everyone who have come today to make this day of Pentecost a celebration of ministry faith and hope. Traditionally we say that the Christian church as a whole was born because of what took place on that 50th day after Christ's resurrection. This occurred during the Feast of Weeks a time of early harvest which called people to gather much like we observed for the May2-4 weekend which was held last week! People were not celebrating anything different at least at first because they were just there- to see people, eat and socialize in Jerusalem.

Yet something was soon to happen. We recall that after His resurrection Jesus told the disciples that the Spirit would come and not leave them as orphans. And last week we heard the story of Jesus' ascension into heaven. Jesus had to leave them in order that the Spirit would come. Jesus knew how to make a great entrance-- think about what occurred in his life! At his birth he stayed in a barn but angels sang out loud. Shepherds worshiped him and a huge star shone in the sky directing travellers as to where he was. This was not coincidence.

When he was ready to start his ministry and life's work, he was baptized. Not in a quiet space- but the Jordan River with several witnesses to what was experienced. The clouds opened up a dove descended as the Spirit and the voice of God spoke-- this is my beloved Son!

Jesus drew crowds wherever he went. Not because they would get a free lunch, no but he preached a new way of love, he performed miracles and he had compassion on those who listened. He gained a following and was seen as the messiah. But there were also dissenters to what he was doing. He was confronting the established faith of the time and taught love.

We know that through his passion story he died a cruel death on the cross, was buried in a borrowed tomb. But we who believe in Christ know that this is not the end. He rose from death. This is what we celebrated 50 days ago! Because Jesus lives we too shall live.

But there are stories which took place after his resurrection and before the coming of the Spirit which call us to think, reflect and wonder what are we supposed to do? What is it that calls us to gather in this place somewhat regularly or sporadically based upon choices? Why is the church important to you? If I were to ask you I would have many different reasons given. Yet do we ever respond “because it is important for my faith growth on a personal level?”

What do you do to grow spiritually? By faith what is it that calls you to be here in this moment? Rev. Park shared the wonderful chapters of Hebrews 11-12 of the heroes of faith from Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham and Sarah, Jacob, Joseph, Moses-- they are the cloud of witnesses who lived godly lives but they did not receive what was promised by God. We have been gifted by Jesus Christ who is the pioneer and perfecter of our faith. It is through Jesus that we know God even more and have the assurance that one day we will all be together!

When Jesus first started his ministry, he was not known. They were fishing when Jesus first called them. They had an idea that maybe it was worth leaving the boats to follow this man. Was he the messiah? They hadn't a clue who he was; but what occurred? They left their nets and followed. These people who became Jesus' closest disciples were unsure of what their life was going to entail. They followed with others soon joining them. For 3 years he taught, he preached, healed, offered support and care for all who would believe who he was. He is the Christ the messiah, the one whom God sent out of love with love to save everyone.

This has been my focus from the time I entered in ministry and will continue to be always. I may be retiring from full time paid accountable ministry (a term I really don't like!) I am accountable only to Christ himself- but the message I shared and offer even today is that Jesus Christ is the Main Thing to focus upon in a Christian church. It is up to all who believe in Jesus and who are committed to serving His church- to keep it this way. The only thing that needs to be checked- is a reminder of who it is we worship, who died and rose again, and who it is that teaches us how to love. As Paul writes, God put his power to work in Christ and has made him the head over all things for the church which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.

Jesus did not use labels for the people who came to hear him. He welcomed all; he healed all, he didn't say I can't heal you because of... or you cannot share in this fish and bread-- he fed everyone who wanted to listen and learn both spiritually and physically. And there was more than enough for all. He wanted people to believe in Him so that they would receive the gift and promise of eternal life. He wanted what we call heaven kingdom to be crowded.. and this is what we have been called to do. Jesus did not set up a hierarchy within the disciples- each of the chosen had gifts and used them; he knew them just as God the father knew them Jesus prayed for them to be one (which is on our UCC Crest) Ut Omnes unum Sint from John 17 "that all may be one."

Prior to his Ascension, Jesus appeared to the disciples at different places, with some doubting he was really alive. The disciples were not sure what to do so many of them went back to what they knew best. They fished. John 21 tells this story- Jesus is on the beach and he looks out to the fishers in the boat. They do not know that it is Jesus. He yells out, " You have no fish have

you? No. Cast your net to the right side of the boat and you will find them.” You could almost hear them muttering. What difference with that make? Fish swim under and around the whole boat. Why would anyone suggest an idea? They know the skills it takes, they have been doing this their entire lives. Why would this stranger suggest this? The disciples were thinking-what would they do when they retire? Many people who retire go fishing-- but if you did this your whole life? What do you do?

This is one of those things I have been reflecting on as I prepare to retire at the end of June. Tomorrow May 25, 2026 I will celebrate my 35th anniversary of my ordination, and having served one year as a Candidate Supply, I have been working in the church for almost 36 years. As I prepare for my retirement I have been reflecting on a few things-- I don't want to think about CHP Mortgage as Peter Mansbridge's ad talks about what it means to retire. I receive this message this week-- "Goodbye tension, hello pension"- this sounds great. But what does it mean to retire from ministry or is it even possible? My faith growth will not stop, but what I do with others will be my choice.

I have been asked about what is/was important to me in my ministry:

1) CHRIST CANDLE

John 1:1 states IN the beginning was the Word and the word was God. The Word also is the light of Christ just as it is the lamp and light for us to follow in our everyday path. When we light the Christ candle, we are reminded of Christ's presence and that the Holy Spirit is present. The burning flame reminds us that God is ever near. Candles lit at baptism remind us that the newly baptized become members of God's family and they can feel the waters of this sacrament renewing their lives. The candle flame reminds us of the fireballs that were over the heads of the disciples on Pentecost as the Spirit came upon them.

2) BELIEFS and knowing Christ

Because I believe and know Jesus, it was during difficult moments such as funerals where I gained strength and was able to lead others through their grief.

a) presided at a funeral for an infant boy whose twin sister lived- both were full term and wonderfully made in God's image

b) at the funeral of a 12 year old girl who died as a result of a drunk driver hitting her while she was trick or treating with 7 other young people.

c) when a young mother had to be induced and deliver a still born baby and have a funeral-- when I was 8 months pregnant

d) when a couple died on their wedding anniversary trip as a result of a car accident

3) SACRAMENTS of Baptism and Holy Communion

a) when adults of different ages present themselves to be baptized and profess their faith; Coming from backgrounds unfamiliar to me, yet wanting and yearning to belong to the church of Jesus. And then parents desiring their children to come to know Jesus' love

b) Holy Communion - I was confirmed at 13 and until then I could not receive this special meal. During my years of ministry, the idea of communion being open to all was changed- people of all ages and backgrounds were welcomed to the table with joy, hope, thanksgiving and faith. The first time I saw children take bread and juice was amazing. And even recently one of the girls was running to get the bread--this was pure joy!

4) WEDDINGS There have also been some different kinds of wedding celebrations- when a Halloween party turned to a wedding. When a casual Christmas gathering became the celebration of marriage and even a home New Year's Eve party enabled the newlyweds to begin their marriage when the New Year began. I have only presided at one wedding on a Sunday. I have been able to share ministry with- a couple married at 91 and 75; and as young as 20 and 19. In various venues, different kinds of priorities. Prayerfully and gratefully, many of which are still married!

But when I reflect on the connections through the years like I have had with the Hill family. It truly is amazing to share in the sacrament of baptism with the children of those whose parents I married and then experienced the joy when those children were confirmed in their faith as teenagers.

There were other celebrations too- 98, 99 , 100th anniversary UCC celebrations at Gesstwood Camp. But the most important for me is when I have been asked to pray for people who have accepted Jesus and that they believe in him. Their hope, joy love and peace is evident in their eyes, in their emotions and hands as they reach up to God in praise and adoration. This is what I see as seeds growing and maturing to clear and gentle faith.

But back to our story of Jesus at the beach and Pentecost..

Jesus told the fishers to throw the net to the right side of the boat. So they did. Within a few minutes there were many fish. Then the disciples recognized Jesus. Peter put on clothes and jumped into the water. The other disciples came in the boat, dragging the net full of fish.

On the beach, Jesus had made a fire with some fish on it cooking. Bring some of the fish and will have a barbecue here on the beach. They did so and they knew Jesus and they were in awe by being in his presence once again.

We know that it was not long after this, they Jesus told them what was going to happen. The Spirit would come but he had to leave first and he told them to wait. Jesus ascended into heaven and the disciples stayed together as much as possible.

They were in city of Jerusalem for the feast of weeks, when suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. Tongues of Fire appeared among them resting on each one. All were filled with the Holy Spirit and they began to speak in other languages because the Spirit gave them this ability.

Out in the street, the crowd gathered near to where the disciples were together. They were bewildered because they heard them speaking in different languages. How can these Galileans speak these words? How can this be?

Some of the people in the street thought the disciples were drunk. Can you imagine if someone came into the church right now and thought we were drunk because of the Spirit? I think it would be amazing to be so full of the joy and wonder of God's Spirit that we wouldn't know how to explain it all. The next thing that happens is that Peter tells the story of Jesus' life and death. His ascension in to heaven. And as we read in verse 33, "Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father, the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you both see and hear." The promise of the Spirit is fulfilled and people listened and wanted to know what should we do?

This is when we say the church began-- people believed, repented, and were baptized for the forgiveness of sins and to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. Have you received this gift? Sometimes the Spirit does lead us to do things we are not sure about. Other times we just say no. most of the time what I have seen is the Spirit encouraging and moving others to do one thing-- ask questions, and seek answers but only if it is ok with those 'in charge'. Sometimes we have developed a fear of political correctness with the hope that we are not being rude, offensive or hurting people. Yet Jesus did not dwell on this-- he saw people as they are. People were like lost sheep who need a shepherd; they needed him as a Shepherd to guide them through this life on earth and to prepare them for the time to come. He told them and us that he is preparing a place for all who believe. Not just certain types of people- all who believe.

The Church is changing and has been for over 500 years. But each time something shifts, we are reminded that God is in charge and making something new. We don't like to change. But

what once held fireballs and hope is now filled with smoke and ashes and just memories of what used to be.

For me, my future is not fully known. The Holy Spirit will guide me into next steps about where and what I will do with the education, experience, knowledge and care that I have acquired in these years of ministry. But what I do know is that my ministry will not end.

Before he ascended in to heaven, he told the disciples to cast their nets on the other side of the boat. Maybe it is time for all of us to do the same. What are we afraid of? The fish swim all around us. And if we are truly fishing for people we need to break the patterns of exclusion and say welcome without labels or put signs of who we want to support and have divisions. Casting their nets on the other side of the boat-- the nets became heavy with fish. But most importantly they realized it was Jesus who told them what needed to be done. Try a new approach, something different, and what did they discover? They would be taking on new roles, addressing crowds, getting people to repent, believe and be baptized. They also saw the needs of the people and they worked to help them. It was Jesus who called them to engage with people and to do so without fear. And I think this is what many people experience- fear- for being told no I'm not interested; no, thanks for the food and support but I don't need Jesus talkers. And we see that the needs are rising- and we just cannot meet them all.

The lyrics to a song by the Longest Johns has this phrase: "I'll tend to the flame, you can worship the ashes." What does this mean in light of who we are? The flame- is the balls of fire brought by the Spirit, the Christ candle that is lit as we worship. But if you are worshiping the ashes, just keep fishing and catch nothing. If you are tending the flame-- be careful. You need to be ready for the response of people and unfortunately our churches right now are not.

We need to discern what about church matters? Maybe we need clarity about why we gather; Clarity about what it means to be a member and about the role of the church in the life of a believer. It calls for intentional reengagement- personal-text, call and conversations- You matter we notice we care. It is not about fundraising but creating meaningful touchpoints beyond Sunday morning—places where relationships deepen and engagement grows. The goal is not attendance pressure. It is intentional discipleship. But it takes committed disciples to have intentional discipleship and it means remembering that Jesus Christ is the Main Thing. It is not about any of us as individuals.

On February 9, I shared my letter with the official board of my request for a change in pastoral relations for the purpose of retirement. The next day I was feeling kind of down. Unsure and wondering if this is right. On February 11, I went for a ride to the River. This too was a difficult day as I remembered our mother's death five years ago and I was really missing her and thinking about next steps. But while I was sitting at the river I watched the water-- filled with ice chunks and with a strong wind. Then I noticed a yellow buoy going up and down, bending in the wind. When I saw it fully standing even for a few seconds, not only did I feel stronger about the decision to retire but was reassured that all will be all right- with me, my family and the Church I leave behind. After 17 years, at Glenwood, 8 at Tilbury -Quinn, 10 at Oil City-Oil Springs and one in Radville, Ceylon and Minton Gladmar, Saskatchewan, I know the Spirit is moving amongst God's people and there will be fireballs and wind once again. We just have to tend that fire for God's Spirit is present!

"Come O Holy Spirit Set our hearts on Fire" are we really willing to have this happen? We know we need each other. But are we wanting this? Jesus has called each one of us to minister in different ways. Jesus knows you, calls you by name, and the question is are you willing to go on the other side of the boat to try something new and even seek other seas?

Let us reflect on this as we give thanks to God for his many blessings to us all. SILENCE. Amen