

Acts 2:1-21
Psalm 104:25-35, 37
Romans 8:14-17
John 14:8-17, 25-27

The Feast of Pentecost

St. Thomas's Anglican Church, Toronto, ON

+In the Name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit

2 years, 2 months, and 23 days ago, the Provincial House of Bishops decided to suspend public worship in the Ecclesiastical Province of Ontario which included the Diocese of Toronto.

St. Thomas's closes its door to public worship

2 years, 2 months, and 21 days ago, the Acolytes' Guild held a Morning Prayer service over Zoom for the first time.

2 years, 2 months, and 14 days ago, we gathered for the first time as a community to worship together over Zoom.

1 year, 11 months, and 19 days ago, the Ecclesiastical Province of Ontario issued the template for reopening parishes and buildings under the name "Loving our Neighbour". This template designated three stages of reopening, red, amber, and green. Red for total closure and heavy restrictions, Amber for partial re-opening under some restrictions, and Green for full re-opening under few to no restrictions respectively. The Diocese of Toronto announces its intention to move to the amber stage in September of 2020.

1 year, 8 months, and 23 days ago, St. Thomas's welcomed people to in-person worship under the strict guidelines of the amber stage.

1 year, 6 months, and 13 days ago, the Diocese of Toronto moved churches in Toronto and Peel back to the red stage and closed churches for public worship, including St. Thomas's.

1 year, 2 months, and 8 days ago, St. Thomas's reopens again under the amber stage guidelines for Palm Sunday.

1 year, 2 months, and 2 days ago, the Diocese of Toronto reduces church capacity to operate with 15% capacity but are otherwise allowed to remain open.

1 year, 1 month, and 17 days ago, the Diocese of Toronto moves back to the red stage guidelines and churches, including St. Thomas's, are closed again.

11 months and 28 days ago, the Diocese of Toronto allows churches to reopen under the amber stage guidelines, and St. Thomas's reopens the following Sunday.

4 months and 26 days ago, the Diocese of Toronto moves all churches back to the red stage guideline and St. Thomas's closes again.

4 months and 4 days ago, the Diocese of Toronto allows churches to determine for themselves whether to re-open under the amber stage guidelines, and St Thomas's does so and reopens on the following Sunday.

And today, on the Feast of Pentecost, June 5, 2022, 2 years, 2 months, and 23 days since March 12, 2020 the Diocese of Toronto moves to the green stage of the "Loving our Neighbour" protocols where decisions about health and safety restrictions are left to the local parish. Though we as a parish are maintaining a number of safety protocols in place, we too enter this green stage.

So much has happened in these 2 years, 2 months, and 23 days. We have gone back and forth between one regime of restrictions to another. We have gone from having one cantor and people quietly humming along to a full choir and hearty congregational singing. We had a very long interim between rectors where Frs Brinton and D'Angelo went above and beyond the call of duty to lead us through much of the pandemic. The Friday Food Ministry remained open, but

continuously adapted to meet the needs of the wider community and the constantly changing provincial restrictions. I was ordained here as a priest on October 20, 2020. We have had baptisms, weddings, and funerals here. We have welcomed new people into our community, and there are members who have passed during the pandemic who we could only say goodbye to over a screen.

I remember that first Zoom service we had; it was a service of Ante-Communion for Laetare Sunday on March 22, 2020. I remember having to preach that day, and I had no idea what to say or how to respond, or even how to comprehend what was lying ahead for us. We were in our homes practicing social distancing in an attempt to blunt the spread of COVID-19 and to flatten the curve of infection so as to not overwhelm our healthcare systems. Many of us were cut-off from our friends and family, only engaging in necessary travel for groceries and medicine. Schools were closed, businesses were shutdown, the economy was uncertain, and the future was and still is unclear. It was as if the world had hit a pause button, and yet we still had to move to continue life in whatever shape we could. The most painful part of this for many of us was that churches were closed, and liturgies were cancelled. We were cut-off from the Eucharist and the Church, the Body and Blood of Christ.

There were many dark days over the past 2 years, 2 months, and 23 days, but even in the midst of that the darkness, the light of Christ continued to shine throughout the world and that radiance overwhelmed the darkness because “the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not.” Jesus tell us “as long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.” Though Jesus has ascended to the Father in Heaven, we believe that Jesus is still present in this world. He never abandoned us, and from him came the Holy Spirit which enlivens each and every one of us to bring forth new life into this world so marked by the pandemic. And now on

this Day of Pentecost, 2 years, 2 months, and 23 days since March 13, 2020 we embrace the Holy Spirit and celebrate by being the Body of Christ wherever we are and in all we do.

The Body of Christ, the Church, is called to be the herald of Christ, to proclaim God's victory over the powers of Sin and Death to all people. We have continued in this mission over the course of the pandemic, and it has not always been easy. We have all gone through a great collective trauma as a parish community, a city, a country, and a planet, and the implications and impacts of this will be felt for generations. But the Body of Christ is not without blemish. Just as Jesus carried the scars of his passion into Heaven, so too does the Church carry the traumas of its members. We hold those traumas together as a community because the Spirit has drawn us together before the Throne of Grace to share all of our joys and all of our sorrows together.

God continues to use flawed beings like us for the redemptive work of this world, and the Spirit empowers us and inspires us to bring forth that love and compassion into our midst and make it manifest in word and deed. This mission, this task that we are all called to do, begins here.

We have been through so much together. Look to your left, look to your right. Who do you see? A family member? fellow parishioner? A friend? Someone you know? Someone you don't know? A colleague? A fellow guild member or chorister? The Spirit is indeed present here and has kept us together during this time. The Holy Spirit fills this place every moment, in every prayer, every reading of the Office, in every Baptism, Eucharist, Wedding, and Funeral.

The Spirit that fills this place is the same Spirit that binds each and every one of us to each other. Indeed, we are never Christian alone; we are always doing it in community with one another whether it is in person or over the internet. We are one parish, one family, with one call

to us all, to spread the Good News of Jesus Christ, and that Spirit will hold us together into the future.

I wish I could say that with the diocese moving to the green stage that the pandemic is over. Pandemics do not end with a great proclamation or VE day-style celebration, that's never how history has worked out. Indeed, the marks of the pandemic are still here, many of us are still masked, especially those of us leading worship, and so we are still taking prudent precautions to ensure the health and safety of our community. COVID-19, like all viruses, continues to mutate and so we may down the road need new vaccines or to mask up once again if and when new spikes of infection occur in society. We all have a great deal of healing to do from the past 2 years, 2 months, and 23 days since March 13, 2020. I don't know what the future holds for us or for our community, but I do know this, we have work to do to rebuild our communities, to rekindle our relationships and friendships, to help people mourn what has been lost, and to celebrate that which we have been given by God. We are empowered by the Spirit to make God manifest in this world so marked by the pandemic, and there is nowhere else I'd rather be, and no one else I would rather do this work alongside of than you all whether you are here in the pews today, or watching over the internet.

So, today, on the Feast of Pentecost, we too must go out like the apostles empowered by the Holy Spirit, to preach the good news of Christ crucified, resurrected, and ascended from this little piece of Huron-Sussex, to the university and city around us, and to all the ends of the GTA and beyond. We can do this, and we will go together.

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