



Ecclesiastical Province of Ontario

Anglican Church of Canada

Opening Sermon by Archbishop Anne Germond

Provincial Youth Gathering, Friday, 28th August, 2026

“Hear what the Spirit is saying to the Church”

These are words we often hear after a lector has read a passage of Scripture.

“Hear”

There is a sense of urgency in that word as if it is an imperative, meaning that what we have just heard is of vital importance. We, as listeners of the spoken Word, are invited to listen with the ear of our mind to interpret the meaning of those words, as well as the ear of our hearts to understand what they might be saying to us now, in this moment, and how they say something about the ‘Living Word’ our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, and what we are being called to do as a result of hearing them. A good hearing of God’s word translates to meaningful action in our lives as a people of faith.

“Hear what the Spirit is saying to the Church.”

This gathering, drawing youth from around the Ecclesiastical Province of Ontario, as well as our guests from the Church of England — welcome Pip and Sophie — is the direct result of the church listening to what the Spirit is saying to it. Those of you who were at Provincial Synod 2024 will recall the moment when courageous youth stood up and spoke about being at the gathering, but not truly feeling a part of the gathering, but rather as outsiders looking on. You asked to be included in the councils of the church in a fresh new way and for funding to help with that fresh new thing.

The result was a financial commitment on the part of Provincial Synod to the youth of our province. Some of you dreamed of what was possible, thought perhaps about a pilgrimage but eventually decided to bring youth representatives from every diocese in Ontario together for worship and prayer, fellowship and learning with the end goal of establishing a provincial youth council. We don’t know what the exact outcome of this gathering will be because some of that is work that we will do together over these days. What I do know is that we will all leave here changed, because of a willingness to give up a whole weekend at the end of the summer to be here, and an openness to hear what the Spirit is saying to us.

This youth gathering has been organized by youth, for youth. That is no small or easy feat, especially as most youth are juggling important studies with part-time jobs, their commitments to home, church and community. But I can say that with some support from older youth...thanks Su, Laura, this first Provincial Youth gathering in Ontario has been arranged entirely by youth. Thank you Paige, Adam and Logan...and other team members not here with us. Well done. And Welcome to you all! May this be a time of joy, of new friends and learning and the start of something really great in Ontario. I’m very excited to be here and thrilled to be welcoming friends from the Church of England.

I love how our first Eucharist is one that invites us to call on the powerful, strong name of the third person of the Trinity — The Holy Spirit — to be here among us as we gather.

One of my favourite hymns begins with the words, *“Breathe on me, Breath of God, fill me with life anew, that I may love the way you love, and do what you would do.”*

The first reading we heard today is one of those mysterious, stunning accounts of the coming of the Holy Spirit. It is the dawn of the day of Pentecost and the followers of Jesus are gathered to wait and to pray. The new day begins in a very unusual way...to us that is — with an eruption of sounds from heaven, and a wind. I don't know if you've ever experienced the sound of a 'rushing wind' — it can be a terrifying thing. When a strong wind like a hurricane or a tornado blows with force through a neighbourhood, things literally fall apart.

This is exactly what is happening here. One has the sense that things are coming loose, breaking open and something new and exciting is coming to birth. Could this possibly be the very same wind which, on the first morning of all mornings, swept across the dark waters becoming the wind of creation.

On this day, the wind is again bringing something new to life.

We learn in verse four that this strange event is none other than the coming of the promised Holy Spirit. John the Baptist, whose tragic beheading will be remembered by us this weekend, spoke of this when he said that the Christ, 'will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire.'

The first gift then, of the Holy Spirit is the gift of speech, the gift of speech in different languages. This is a story about the coming of the Holy Spirit into the community, and the first fruit of the Spirit is the gift of proclamation — the public declaration of good news. Something amazing, incredible, unbelievable is happening. Those who receive the gift are transformed by it. Their lives will never be the same again as we hear when fearful Peter stands and delivers one heck of a sermon.

But those standing by watching do not accept this gift with open arms...they are confused and bewildered, almost mocking the disciples who have received the gift as if they are simply drunk — filled with new wine. Isn't it amazing, this incredible gift of God is explained by the world as inebriation!

I don't know what your experience has been as youth in our church, but there have been times when I've prayerfully discerned that God's Holy Spirit was calling me to engage in something new and people in the Church, upon hearing about it, shut it down before it ever got off the ground...“you won't ever get support, funding, volunteers; we've tried that and it never worked; just forget about it and go back to doing the same old thing.” Resonate with you?

But the Spirit of God will not be thwarted by naysayers — what is happening here is proof of that...the Holy Spirit is afoot and even though we have questions, and are bewildered, fresh winds are blowing and we are here in these days to receive all the gifts God is going to pour down upon us.

We gather today as young people from across the province — well you are all young, not me — coming with that same posture of openness and expectation that the first disciples of Jesus had that Pentecost day.

There may be voices that question this gathering, doubt what God can do through young people, or even choose not to support what is happening here.

But the invitation of Jesus is not to listen to the naysayers — it is to receive.

In the parable of the sower, Jesus reminds us that the seed is scattered generously, falling on different kinds of soil.

The question is not whether the seed is good; the seed is good!

The farmer in this parable is not a normal planter; “he is a farmer whose methods reflect the kingdom of heaven. He sows the seed extravagantly, as widely as he can, oblivious to the risks, much as God lavishes mercy upon humanity.” (Thomas Long)

To be sure the farmer takes some losses — birds snatching the seed; the sun scorching young new plants. But in spite of all these wasted efforts there is a bumper crop — a hundred, sixty, thirty fold.

We in the church know the truth of this parable. Where do we even begin to cast the seed? New ideas fall flat. Bureaucracy chokes out much needed neighborhood projects; hard soil is all around; thorny people prickle and hurt.

But...this parable is about the generous sower, so we listen for what the Spirit is saying to us now. We keep on spreading seed and showing the compassion of the kingdom.

We keep our hearts ready to receive the gift God wishes to give us now.

So as the Holy Spirit moves among us, let us open our hearts to the gifts, words, callings, and new possibilities God desires to plant within us.

We have gathered for a reason, and perhaps what looks small or uncertain to some may become the beginning of something far greater in the hands of God.

In ways we do not always know and can't always see the gospel has already fallen on the good soil of YOU, and even now a great harvest is growing in the seeds planted by you.

“Hear what the Spirit is saying to the Church.”

Amen