

Immanuel United Church

June 12th, 2022

The first Sunday after Pentecost!

Welcome

Call to Worship:

The Holy Spirit came as fire and wind.

Come, Holy Spirit, come!

People of all genders, all ages, all cultures, all languages,
witnessed the day of Pentecost.

Come, Holy Spirit, come!

The people were bewildered, astonished, amazed!

They wondered:

What are we to do?

Then Peter stood and raised his voice.

We need to know: What did he say?

He said, "We're not drunk. We are filled with God's spirit
so that we can tell you about Jesus of Nazareth."

Come, Holy Spirit, come!

The spirit danced in fire and in a multitude of languages.

The spirit was poured out on those from young to old.

Come, Holy Spirit, come!

Dare to be dreamers and to believe.

Come, Holy Spirit, come.

Dare to believe in what can and could be, for

God is gracious.

God is the Creator.

God's love knows no bounds.

Come, Holy Spirit, come!

Come, abide and empower us today!

Prayer:

**Spirit of Life, Breath of God, wind that moves over the earth,
we are humbled by your presence and power.**

**We are here this morning to take you in and experience the transforming ways
of your love, to rest a little while and sing and pray
and be in sacred fellowship with one another.**

If we arrive here empty, may we leave filled.

If we arrive here lonely, may we leave uplifted.

**If we arrive here anxious, may we leave knowing peace.
May we be a blessed and blessing people today and every day. Amen.**

Hymn: VU 382 *Breathe On Me, Breath of God*

Scripture: John 7:37-39

On the last day of the festival, the great day, while Jesus was standing there, he cried out, "Let anyone who is thirsty come to me, and let the one who believes in me drink. As the scripture has said, 'Out of the believer's heart shall flow rivers of living water.'" Now he said this about the Spirit, which believers in him were to receive; for as yet there was no Spirit, because Jesus was not yet glorified.

Reflection: *Let Justice Flow* Jane Nicholls

Good morning.

For anyone who might be a visitor, my name is Jane Nicholls and I am a long-time member here at Immanuel. I have several reasons for speaking with you today. Over the past few months, sponsored by our congregation, I have been taking a course from Lynda Trono, community minister at 1 Just City. The course is called **Let Justice Flow**, and has as its aim "to explore discipleship and mission through learning in community, theological reflection and volunteering at 1 Just City sites." This morning I want to share with you some background about 1 Just City, how I became involved and a bit of what I learned. Finally, I want to extend an invitation to you folks about how you might become involved as well.

As many of you know, I serve on the Council of Immanuel. For many years, although recently that has changed, I was the liaison person for the Living Our Faith in the World cluster. As such, I had regular contact with Ruth Shepherd, who serves as the guiding elder for that cluster. It was my job to ensure that anything Ruth wanted to share with Council got shared. It was as this liaison person that Ruth contacted me with an opportunity this past September. The folks involved in the work of Living our Faith in the World had been made aware of the opportunity presented by this course. None of those folks had the requisite time, health or energy to take the course. Ruth knew that I had recently retired from teaching and wondered if I might be interested. I decided to give it a go. The church generously paid my registration fee, and Ruth offered up support from both herself and Dianne Tucker.

When I signed up for the course, I didn't know much about 1 Just City. I knew that it was a charitable organization with strong ties to the United Church. I had heard of the

St Matthew's Maryland site, and knew that members of our congregation made sandwiches for them and that was about as far as it went. I am certain that many of you will know much more than that, but I am going to give us all a bit of background, some of it taken from their website and some I learned as I went along.

This is a direct quote from their web site:

We work towards a city where all are cared for, have enough to eat, a place they belong, and feel loved. Our four pillars are:

Loving the Underloved, Working Towards Reconciliation,

Growing Individual's Capacity, and Building Inclusive Communities.

1JustCity is an organization that supports three drop-in community centres in Winnipeg's core neighbourhoods: West Broadway, the West End and Osborne Village. Our services include daily meals, art, senior's programs, sharing circles, haircuts, showers, laundry, toiletries, and clean undergarments. In the winter months we also run the pop-up warming centre in Osborne Village: Just a Warm Sleep.

1 Just City is an umbrella organization, that has replaced some former United church initiatives, such as Stella Mission, West Broadway Community Ministry and St Matthew's Maryland Community Ministry. Interestingly, 1 Just City does not have a specific religious affiliation any more. On the day of our first session, Josh Ward, who is a director, talked to us about how many of the clientele served by 1 Just City had negative experiences with church, including but not limited to residential school trauma. Many people felt more comfortable coming to a place that did not have specific ties to a church, although some employees still do.

And now a bit more about the course. There were 12 participants, and Lynda. Many of us came from the United Church, but there were also folks from the Anglican and Mennonite churches. We had the opportunity to learn in community and grow our understanding of the realities facing those who live in poverty. We had the chance to volunteer at 1 Just City sites, meet people from different walks of life, engage in role play and hear some dynamic speakers. The group of us became really bonded and are making plans to continue to work together, even though the course has ended. We had some challenges associated with COVID-19, necessitating a switch to Zoom for awhile. Other times, we were able to meet in person and share a meal before studying and learning together. Most of our sessions took place at the West Broadway site, located in Young United Church, but we also had a session at Oak Table (Augustine United Church) and at St. Matthew's Maryland.

We were given fairly strict guidelines about preserving people's dignity and privacy, so I am not going to mention any specific names unless I have that person's permission.

I would like to highlight for you some of the things I learned and discussed during the course. Regarding the issue of poverty, we played a "Poverty Monopoly" game where we were assigned a life circumstance, told what amount of money we would receive from social assistance, and then had to plan our lives. I was part of a couple, and I was amazed how little we were given to live on – the money didn't even cover rent for a not-so-great apartment – my partner and I had to live in a rooming house if we wanted to be able to eat. You drew cards, as in Monopoly, and various things, positive or negative, happened to you. It was amazing how much an extra \$200 expense could set you back, or how much a \$50 windfall could help. Differing life circumstances brought differing amounts of money, and I could see how having children could be seen as a "money maker," since those with children were given significantly more money. I know it was a game, but it surprised me that I got very emotionally involved in it. In fact, my inclination was to try and cheat – to misrepresent my circumstances if I thought it would help me financially. This small taste of planning a life where money is very scarce was very eye-opening.

We also learned a lot about food insecurity. I learned that it is possible to find enough food / groceries from charitable organizations and food banks in Winnipeg, but it takes an extraordinary amount of time, which I had not ever thought about before. You have to know which agency is handing out food when and which days of the week are good for getting emergency groceries. You will have to stand in line at some of these places, so you need to be prepared for that. Lynda Trono told us that she had estimated that, if you wanted to get all your food and groceries from charitable agencies, it probably took the equivalent number of hours to a half time job, not to mention the organizational skills of a project manager. I spoke with several of Winnipeg's "food insecure" folks over the last few months, and almost without exception people were both grateful and thankful for what they received.

We had several presentations that addressed the issue of belonging and feeling cared for. We heard from a woman who spends a lot of time with addicts, and I think she said she had dispensed Narcan more times than she could count, Narcan being the antidote for opiate overdoses. I was struck by this woman's compassion and commitment for treating addicts as real people, for whom addiction did not have to be the only thing that defined them. We had a guest speaker who had been abducted and raped, and after counselling had become a volunteer for a drop-in centre in Winnipeg. This woman still suffered from debilitating PTSD symptoms, but she radiated such vivacity and joy for life and was so happy to give back to the organization and the people that had helped

her. We also had a presentation from a trans woman, who was a military helicopter pilot before transitioning from male to female. She was very matter of fact about the challenges she had faced and spoke with a wry sense of humour. I couldn't even begin to imagine what it must have been like for her, to be in a macho, often misogynistic organization like the military, and know that she wanted to change her gender identity. No wonder she waited until she retired from the military to do so.

Some of the most challenging and rewarding sessions we had concerned 1 Just City's goal of working toward reconciliation. On a Saturday, we spent our whole day at the Oak Table site, listening to folks affected by residential schools. I found the day both exhausting and profoundly moving. The people who spoke to us were employees of 1 Just City and I don't want to share any of their details. Instead, I am going to quote Richard Wagamese the well known Canadian indigenous author. I think his point of view is very similar to what we heard. This is taken from Chapter 6 of the book **Stolen Lives: The Indigenous Peoples of Canada and the Indian Residential Schools**, and it speaks to the effect of residential schools on those who did not even attend them.

I am a victim of Canada's residential school system. When I say victim, I mean something substantially different than "Survivor." I never attended a residential school, so I cannot say that I survived one. However, my parents and my extended family members did. The pain they endured became my pain, and I became a victim. When I was born, my family still lived the seasonal nomadic life of traditional Ojibway people. In our great rolling territories, they fished, hunted, and trapped. We lived communally. Along with my mother and siblings, there were my matriarchal grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins. Time was irrelevant in the face of ancient cultural ways that we followed.

But there was a spectre in our midst.

All the members of my family attended residential school. They returned to the land bearing psychological, emotional, spiritual, and physical burdens that haunted them. Each of them had experienced an institution that tried to scrape the Indian off of their insides, and they came back to the bush and river raw, sore, and aching. The pain they bore was invisible and unspoken. It seeped into their spirit, oozing its poison and blinding them from the incredible healing properties within their Indian ways.

For a time, the proximity to family and the land acted as a balm. Then, slowly and irrevocably, the spectre that followed them back from the schools began to assert its presence and shunt for space around our communal fire. When the vitriolic stew of unspoken words, feelings, and memories of their great dislocation, hurt, and isolation began to bubble and churn within them, they discovered that alcohol could numb them from it. And we ceased to be a family.

Instead, the adults of my family became frightened children. The trauma that had been visited upon them reduced them to that. They huddled against a darkness from where vague shapes

whispered threats and from where invasions of their minds, spirits, and bodies roared through the blackness to envelop and smother them again. They forgot who they were. They struck back vengefully, bitterly, and blindly as only hurt and frightened children could do.

That's a pretty potent description of the effects of residential schools, and one that we heard from several people over the course of that day. I was humbled by people's willingness to share stories of such deep hurt and trauma – and they did it with a sense of joy and thanksgiving, and told us they were grateful for the chance to share their stories.

If you're interested in further reading, I would recommend Richard Wagemese's writings to you – in particular I enjoyed the novel *Ragged People* which tells the story of a group of homeless people who win the lottery – there's a whole lot to unpack in that book about poverty, food insecurity and residential school trauma.

That's certainly not all I learned, but I hope it gives you a taste of it. I would like to talk now about my volunteer experiences. As a part of the course requirements, we were asked to volunteer at all three 1 Just City sites. Covid, bad weather and general busyness meant that I didn't get around to that until May, but I did have the chance to do a volunteer shift at all three sites. In every case, I was made to feel welcome and appreciated. On Wednesday, May 4 I went to the West Broadway site and served dinner. One of my fellow students in the course was there at the same time, which made it a lot less intimidating. It wasn't too busy and everyone was friendly, both workers and clients. On Tuesday May 10th I went to Oak Table to serve lunch. That place is a well-oiled machine!! They had a lot of volunteers that day, so I didn't feel as useful as I would have liked to be. I did manage to make a ton of tuna salad! And I saw a different fellow student there. We were also entertained by a vocal group during lunch, which I gather happens fairly frequently. On May 17, I went to the west end site and worked at the drop in. That was my most rewarding experience. I worked with them some of my fellow students. They had a ton of guests so I felt very useful. The time flew by as I prepared and served coffee and sandwiches, and had the chance to visit with some of the people there to eat. I didn't pre-arrange to go with my fellow students, but at least one of them was there every time I went. I am sure that there will continue to be ongoing connections amongst us, as we keep in touch and make plans for continuing to volunteer.

Now for the part that involves you, the members of Immanuel's congregation. I am hoping that we might be able to take a few folks for a tour of the Oak Table site, at Augustine United. The 4,500 square foot basement space was extensively renovated, re-opening in 2020. It supports hundreds of guests each week with everything from meals to health services and art classes. It is a beautifully done renovation and is well worth the trip to go see it. I would hope to organize the tour in September, so if you sign up today it is just as a show of interest. We are thinking possibly of combining our tour

with one being organized at John Black, by two of my fellow students from the class. I don't know anything about date and time as yet, but if you think you might be interested, there's a sign-up sheet in the Amen corner. Who knows, it might even inspire some of you to do some volunteering, but that is not a requirement of attendance at the tour.

Thanks for listening to me, thanks for sponsoring me to take this course, and thanks especially to Ruth and Dianne for supporting me as I did so, and helping me to plan today's talk and make plans for the tour.

Any questions?

Hymn: VU 606 *In Christ There Is No East or West*

Offering

Prayers of the People

Hymn: VU 375 *Spirit, Spirit of Gentleness*

Commissioning and Benediction:

God loves you. God provides for you.

God-in-Three-Persons knows you.

May the love of our Creator, the Holy Spirit,
and the risen Christ, be with you now, all week, and in all ways.

Go in peace, faith, and love. Amen.

Amen