

## THE FORCE BE WITH YOU

Pentecost Year C

Gen. 11:1-11; Ps. 104:24-34,35b; Acts 2:1-21; Jn. 14:8-17, (25-27) Gladstone 05/06/2022

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The famed French poet, novelist, and dramatist of the Romantic movement, Victor Hugo, tells the story of a bee that had become trapped inside his study, one day.

In its attempt to escape from the room the bee was furiously beating itself and bumping itself against one of the windows.

Hugo saw on the floor other bees that had already killed themselves doing the very same thing, so he decided to rescue the small creature that was dashing out its little brains on the window.

First, he opened the window and using a napkin he tried to shoo the bee out, instead, the bee flew in the opposite direction—back into the depths of the study.

Hugo realized that he would have to catch the bee in order to save it and so with his napkin he began to track the bee down.

When the bee saw Hugo coming it flew away towards another window, which was closed and again began to beat itself against it, this time with even greater frenzy than before. As the bee flew at the window repeatedly, it buzzed loudly.

Hugo was sure the bee was buzzing a message to him, saying to him, “Despot, you would deprive me of liberty! Cruel executioner, why do you not leave me alone, why do you persecute me?”

Hugo paid no attention to the message he thought the bee was trying to send however, he instead gently pinned the bee between the window and the napkin and began to fold the bee inside the cloth. Even then the bee struggled against his fingers and the cloth, trying to sting him—but at last the job was done—and Hugo managed to get it to the open window, and put it outside.

For a moment the bee seemed stunned, perhaps amazed, then it flew off to its chosen destination.

There are, I think, a couple of important similarities between this story of the bee and the story of the Tower of Babel, that we are looking at from our reading from Genesis, this morning. In both of these stories we see the subjects attempting to do something, and in both stories they chose a method of doing that thing in way that was harmful to them.

The bee, like birds that I’ve seen that have flown into a room and then couldn’t get out it, tries to fly through a closed window in its attempt to be free—and the people of Shinar on the great plain of Babylonia, attempt to keep their common language and their unity

intact, by building a great city for themselves. And in that city, they begin to build a great tower—a tower so high that it would reach into heaven.

Both the bee and the people of Shinar seek freedom of one kind or another; they seek not only to get away from danger, but also to get to something that is good—to build something or experience something that is glorious.

The Scripture says that God looked upon the people of Shinar, and saw that they were seeking a name for themselves, and that their tower was beginning to ascend into heaven, and knew that if they continued in that course, that they would succeed in everything that they proposed, and so God scattered them abroad upon the face of the earth and confused their language so that they would not be able to understand each other and so succeed in their purpose.

I suggest to you that, rather than this being an act of cruelty, this was, in fact, an act of mercy. I also suggest to you that the story of the bee, and the story of the tower of Babel, are our stories.

Each of us want to escape the chaos and the constant threat of annihilation that is to be found out there in the great wilderness of our world. We want to avoid the dangers of daily life, be it physical hunger or spiritual emptiness, and create for ourselves and our children a glorious future—a future in which there is no need to worry about losing our lives and all that makes our lives seem so good to us—a future in which we don't have to worry about what we shall have to eat, or what we shall have to wear, or what it is that we might have to do—for all we need will be guaranteed to be there for us, and in all things we will be able to do what we want to do.

These are not evil goals in and of themselves—but like the bee, and like the people of Shinar, we often get into trouble in working towards these goals, because the methods we use are foolish and unwise. We so often push against the river of life—rather than going with its flow, calmly and easily, in the knowledge that the water of life will hold us up, and end up bringing us to our goal or perhaps, to an even better one.

Our drive for security, for safety, and for glorious ease, leads us to build our own towers—towers of protection, towers that attempt to reach into heaven and gain for us the power of God himself. Our towers of protection and security, of domination and power have led our planet to the brink of environmental and social disaster. And as our towers have reached ever and ever higher, millions of species of plants, animals, and insects have perished.

As we have tried to protect ourselves and our future, millions of people have suffered drought, starvation, calamities, and of course the dreaded COVID-19 virus. As we try to enjoy a standard of living that is beyond all reason, a standard of living based on limitless consumption of the world's non-renewable resources—the ozone has thinned, cancer has increased, wars have multiplied, and our own precious children have become bitter, unhappy, troubled, and violent.

*“Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves; otherwise we shall be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth.” (Gen. 11:4)*

Like the bee, we keep hitting the window. And like the bee, we have an author trying to save us, trying to get us to the very goal that we seek, trying to help us.

In the Movie STAR WARS, that was made—well its getting to be quite a long time ago—there is a lot of technology floating around. There is the Death Star commanded by the Evil Lord, Darth Vader, and there are the small fighter ships piloted by the Rebels.

The movie is a classic adventure story—a battle between Good and Evil . But what’s most fascinating about the movie is not the machinery and the technology that the film portrays with such stunning success, but rather it is something that George Lucas calls the Force.

The hero of the movie is, as you all well know, Luke Skywalker, a very young man—impulsive and eager to make a difference, and in the end he does make a difference, because he tunes into the “Force”.

Now, I don’t really want to get into a debate of the nature of “the Force”. We can go in all sorts of mystical and non-Christian directions if we were so inclined. I simply want to look at it within the context of a fictional story.

The force in the movie is kind of like God—in some ways. It consists of the life energy, the life soul, of all living creatures—and that force, once you tune into it, can be used to do good, or do evil, although the force is by nature, good.

The force is stronger than machinery, stronger than any technology, stronger in fact than anything that was, is, or ever will be, and it’s all around, to be touched and felt and responded too, whenever one is ready for it.

Luke saves the rebels from destruction in the first movie by remembering the force, and concentrating on the force, and allowing the force to guide his actions. Luke’s not perfect in this—he does not easily open himself up to the force, but, in the end, he does manage to tune in, and the Force does work through him, and so there is a happy ending to the movie.

I mention the Force to you today because something very much like the Force is at the heart of the Christian Faith—that which we call the Holy Spirit. Now, the Force, as it’s displayed in Star Wars is more of a Eastern mystical invention and is, of course antithetical to the Christian religion, but let’s not get too bogged down in that. I use it here merely as an illustration.

The Holy Spirit is the power of God and the Essence of God. It’s the power which upholds the universe itself. It’s that which was poured out upon the first believers in Christ on the day of Pentecost—and has ever since come to dwell within each one of us who believes.

In all our prayers for new believers and the newly baptised—which we will be doing shortly—we pray for the Holy Spirit's indwelling—and in all our thoughts about God, we understand the Spirit of God to be that which is effective in our lives. It leads, it teaches, it convicts us of sin and communicates the forgiveness of God, it gives us dreams and visions, and helps us to understand them, it comforts us, sustains us, inspires us, strengthens us, and renews us—and in the end it draws us closer to each other, and to Jesus Christ our brother and to God our Father, who are one.

It's by the Spirit that people are healed in Christ's name. It's by the Spirit that wisdom comes and it's by the Spirit that words of prophecy are uttered—the words that call for justice, that warn about the need for repentance, and that speak of the future that God will bring to pass. It's the Spirit that makes our faith come alive and it's the Spirit that does the work of salvation in our daily lives. It is the Spirit that renews us, and surprises us with the glory, and the power, and the joy of life in God's care.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, the Spirit is all around us, and within us. That is what the day of Pentecost means.

There is an author to our personal stories—an author like Victor Hugo—chasing us around his study—trying to let us go free—to let us fly in the larger world—without fear or worry.

He works by his Spirit, He is Spirit. We need to let that Spirit catch us, to rise up from its home inside us, and to blow upon us when we walk outside.

Think about your dreams, listen to what people around you are really saying, stop and read the word that the wise have always held up before us—the Word that the Spirit uses in such wonderful ways at times—to comfort us or to challenge us. As some have said: to comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable.

Hear the visions that other people speak of—visions of change towards wholeness, of justice and of plenty for all—a justice and a plenty based on acts of love and mercy and devotion.

Expect to be surprised by God. Expect good things to occur. Believe in the Spirit and the Power of God—trust in it—and marvellous things will happen.

The tower of Babel will fall—and the unity and the understanding that we need so much, will come to us and remain with us—as it did to the first disciples on the day of Pentecost.

To God, Father, Son and Holy spirit, be all glory, honour, majesty and power. Amen.