

**The Day of Pentecost, Year C**  
**Acts 2: 1-21; Psalm 104: 24-34; Romans 8: 14-17; John 14: 8-17, (25-27)**  
**Christ Episcopal Church La Crosse**  
**June 9, 2019**

**Come Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful and kindle in us the fire of your Love. I speak to you in the Name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.**

Several nights ago, while I was sorting through papers and books in my living room, I spied the remnants of an Easter basket that one of my grandsons had left in the corner. Hmm— I wondered— maybe there’s still a few jelly beans in there— there was not. I can do without the chocolate bunnies— it still bothers me to bite their heads off— and I can do without the marshmallow peeps. No thanks. I love jelly beans.

That’s it then— it’s official: the end of the Easter season. The majesty, the magnificence, the miracle of Easter is kind of in the distant past— the pomp of music and poetry, “Christ the Lord is risen today” and so on.

The ripples of the resurrection have stilled. So has my spiritually. It’s not in tatters, mind you, like my grandson’s Easter basket, but it’s calmer now. The tomb has been empty for awhile; there’s less news to tell, no one running to see the grave clothes and walking away, scratching their heads, astonished— the way Peter did. And pretty soon, in fact, the church will settle in for a long summer of what is called ordinary time. How unpromising!

But not yet. This Sunday, June 9, we celebrate Pentecost, the middle child of Christian holidays; wedged between Christmas and Easter. Pentecost doesn’t call attention to itself— there’s no tinsel, no pastel colored eggs.

There is, however, a distinctive magic to Pentecost— a full blown experience of God. So let’s look a bit closer at this major turning point in the Christian story— the Festival of Pentecost— because it orients us toward what is central, even crucial, about the Christian faith.

In case you haven't figured it out yet, today marks the end of the Easter season. The Feast of Pentecost is the liturgical marker of Christ's promise to send the Holy Spirit among us. And as we heard in the passage from the Acts of the Apostles, the disciples were gathered together fifty days after Passover to celebrate the Feast of Weeks, or from the Greek, Pentecost. This festival was originally an agricultural festival in which the first harvests of the season were offered. Over time, the festival became an opportunity to commemorate the giving of the Laws to Moses at Mt. Sinai— so this festival was significant indeed.

On this particular day, ten days after the Ascension of Christ, the disciples were no doubt frightened and sad— grieving the loss of their risen Lord, who had gone away.

I can only imagine that the disciples were still uncertain as to the true nature of the events swirling around them. I wasn't there, of course, but in my imagination, I hear the disciples saying, to one another, "Well, where do we go from here?" On some level they must have felt abandoned, and wondered, "What do we do now?"

And like most of us, I know what it's like to be in search of meaning, and purpose, and to be afraid. I suspect we all know how this feels. And we ask ourselves in the face of loss, and grief, and feeling alone— "What do I do now?"

I love the Pentecost story from Acts about the Holy Spirit descending with a loud noise like a violent wind and appearing on the disciples like tongues of fire. That first Pentecost— Jesus' friends and family speaking in other tongues— and people gathered around to watch at nine in the morning. What those gathered saw didn't look like Sunday morning church services. What they saw looked more like the aftermath of a party. All were amazed and perplexed— some sneered saying, "They are filled with new wine. " (Acts 2: 13) They weren't drunk, of course, but they looked like it.

Wouldn't that be something— to be so taken up with God that onlookers think we're drunk with sweet wine? Wouldn't it be remarkable to ride the edge of ecstasy? From our

account, the coming of the Holy Spirit was a noisy and visibly stunning event, which turned a bunch of frightened disciples into bold proclaimers of the Gospel.

But for many of us, we are much more comfortable confining the Holy Spirit to deep, interior experiences, often times occasioned by long walks along the beach, or in mountains, preferably at sunset. Somehow in the quiet, in the solitude, in nature, in the sunset, the Holy Spirit speaks to something deep within our souls, in a way that somehow brings us comfort.

And the response we get to these musings on the Holy Spirit is usually pretty much the same. OK— that was nice. I guess the Holy Spirit is the nice part of the Trinity.

The problem is that the Holy Spirit we meet in Pentecost blows the doors off the building, lights up the room like a fireworks display, and has the disciples speaking such strange and wondrous things.

Author Annie Dillard writes in her book, *“Teaching a Stone to Talk”*, and I quote:

“Does anyone have the foggiest idea what sort of power we so blithely invoke? Or, as I suspect, does no one believe a word of it? ... it is madness to wear ladies straw hats and velvet hats to church; we should be wearing crash helmets. Ushers should issue life preservers and signal flares, they should lash us to the pews.”  
End quote.

Pentecost. Crash helmets. Signal flares. Tongues of fire falling on each of us— blowing the doors off the building, lighting up the room like fireworks— being bewildered and astonished!

Yet this is only half the story of Pentecost. The Holy Spirit didn’t stay in Jerusalem— Peter gets up and gives a speech that doesn’t try to explain away the strange and wondrous things that were happening in that upper room. Peter talks about the Spirit turning the world upside down. It is strange— wondrous— even scary. Peter talks about the power of the Holy Spirit let loose in the world, and a people filled with the Spirit of God who have been empowered to change the world.

So, at this point in writing my sermon, I had to pause and remind myself to resist the temptation of simply continuing to commemorate, to remember, the Festival of Pentecost, to

explain it away. It is indeed important to mark this turning point in our Christian story— after all, festivals do call us to remember God’s faithful action in the past— which is a good thing— as long as it prompts me, and all of us, to look for God’s action among us in the present and prepare for God’s action through us in the future. I don’t want our attention to linger in the past.

Pentecost was never intended to be a once only affair. Today we are celebrating the fact that the coming of the Holy Spirit is a daily event in the life of the Christian and in the life of the church— the Holy Spirit still blows the doors off buildings, lights up the room like a fireworks display, and will leave us astounded and bewildered. The Holy Spirit blows in faster than a summer squall and drenches God’s people in possibility and hope. It’s the same Spirit— timeless yet totally today.

The Holy Spirit testifies who we are. We are God’s children— for each of us our Pentecost occurred when we were baptized— at baptism we were sacramentally filled with the Holy Spirit and not even Satan can snatch us out of God’s hand once we have been washed in the water of spiritual rebirth.

Through the water and God’s Word of promise we were adopted into God’s family— our sins were and continue to be forgiven and we are assured that we will spend eternity in the joy of heaven. At our baptism we received the Spirit of God who promised that throughout our life’s journey— through the twists and turns that life takes us— the Holy Spirit is there— God doesn’t give up on us.

Jesus gave the disciples some very important work to do while he is away— and, naturally, the disciples are anxious about the future— especially after Jesus recently predicted his death, betrayal, and denial— the disciples are developing cold feet as they think about carrying on with out Jesus.

Jesus, understanding the disciple's anxiety, assures them they won't be alone— and sends “another Advocate” “who will” be with them forever. And the promised Spirit turns the world upside down. The disciple's courage and missionary zeal cannot be held back. They go from the Pentecost experience to continuing to teach, preach, heal, and care for the sick, the poor, reaching out to others, standing up to the authorities of the day, and even dying for the sake of the Gospel. Who would have thought this possible?

Is it any different today? Of course, all of us are anxious about our future— and certainly anxious about our church as we discern the future here. Yes, there are churches everywhere where membership is declining, and churches are closing. There are churches with financial worries— churches and places where people are overwhelmed by new ministry needs— but— any church, and yes, our church, Christ Church, has not been abandoned!

The Spirit is still with us— breathing new life into us— filling us with courage as we face new challenges before us— as we risk being transformed into something new.

The Spirit still breathes new life into this church and into all of us as we continue to reach out in ministry— to feed the hungry— heal the sick— and in some cases, stand up to the authorities of our day.

As individuals we also experience times of anxiety and grief— at the death of loved ones, when we face major illnesses— lose a job— face family difficulties— feel lost— or experience violence. But guess what? Guess what? The Spirit of God is there for us, too— to reassure us we are not alone— and nothing in this world can separate us from the love of God in Jesus Christ.

When the Holy Spirit makes “herself” known in our lives, never giving the message to just keep on doing what you are doing— or when the Spirit breaks through our anxiety, the Spirit always brings something new.

New life— new energy— new purpose— new vision— new empowerment— new courage— transformation— change. The Spirit never leaves us as she finds us— we are always changed.

“Now what do we do?” the disciples asked in those days after Ascension— now what do we do, we ask on this glorious Pentecost morning— each of us— on our own journey— Christ Church on its journey— well, we begin in gratitude for what has been done for us through Christ— we break bread— we offer ourselves in service— in community— in Christ— here and now with utter abandon and clarity— what a thrill to feel God so deeply— that is the magnificence we wouldn’t want to miss this Sunday— an otherwise ordinary day in this time between Easter and Christmas.

Don’t let Pentecost slip through your fingers— I send you forth to look for God’s ongoing Pentecost— so put on your crash helmets— set off the signal flares— lash yourselves to the pews— let the tongues of fire fall upon each of you— let the Holy Spirit blow the doors off the building— because the pastel colored eggs and jelly beans are gone.

Amen.

Annie Dillard- *Teaching a Stone to Talk* (Harper & Row, 1982)