

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

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St. Peter's Glenside
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Pentecost

Breathe on me, breath of God

Come Holy Spirit come, and give life and meaning to my words. AMEN

When it comes to Pentecost, historically at least, I've been a bit of an outlier. I don't own anything in red, and one year when I bought something to wear to church, it soon found its way to Goodwill. And the languages—important, powerful, to be sure—and yet?

For me the trappings of Pentecost were more of a distraction than a connection. Yes, it's billed as the "birthday of the church" but for me, at least, every day is the birthday or the church as we each makes our way into our daily lives, taking a stab at living our lives as followers of Jesus.

But I love the Holy Spirit and given a chance to read, ponder, and meditate on this great mystery for even just a few minutes on a summer Sunday? I'm all in. Trickster, muse, breath of God, call it what you will, it is one of the greatest and best mysteries of our faith and today we stop and say, "Ah, ha!" welcoming its presence among us – the third leg of the stool that defines and anchors are faith: Father, Son, and Holy Ghost—in what Richard Rohr calls "the divine dance" an invitation to us all.

But Pentecost symbolizes even more.

Years ago, I interviewed a man who lost his father in Vietnam when he was a small boy. He told me that the year he turned 29, the age his dad was when he was killed, he felt a profound loss—because he said, "I no longer had a father to imagine."

While growing up, he'd found consolation in thinking of what his dad was doing at a similar age. But now he no longer had a father to imagine anymore.

And it's the same with Jesus. He ascends into heaven and days later, the Spirit descends because we no longer have a Jesus to imagine. It's all on us and up to us to realize God's kingdom here on earth and we can't afford to be wallflowers at the divine dance.

Nor can we ever be abandoned by God, because the gift of the Holy Spirit places God *within us*. Our task is to discern who we are *in God* who knows us better than we know ourselves and the outgrowth of that knowing means transformation and action.

While I didn't think of myself as petitioning the Holy Spirit when I wanted to change my life, I now realize that I was. After years in TV, I wanted the last part of my career to be in service to God from my deep sense of gratitude for the life I had lived. When I kneeled at the Eucharist every Sunday I prayed—"Let my will be thy will." I had no idea it was a dangerous prayer.

To say I had no idea where that might lead is an understatement. Maybe non-profit work in New York City?

The Holy Spirit intervened at an Easter Brunch at the Plaza Hotel in New York when a friend said I might be interested in the Psychiatry and Religion program at Union Theological seminary. Bing! That spark—lit on Easter Sunday, no less—changed everything and led me right here, a place beyond imagining, to me, but apparently not to God. (Along with it came something to wear in red.)

But Pentecost is more than inner transformation: What starts in us doesn't end there.

As St. Theresa of Avila nearly 500 years ago: "If you become what you should be, the world will be set afire."

The Holy Spirit isn't magic, but mystery. We live now with such uncertainty and deep fears that most of us want answers, not mystery. We want assurances that our world is safe, our children won't be murdered in their classrooms, our democracy will survive and climate change – remember climate change?-- won't render world inhabitable.

Daring to hope these days is dangerous—which is why we need to open our hearts especially wide this Pentecost because the miracle of Pentecost is that the Holy Spirit has the power to create one from many. Although speaking in different tongues and languages, everyone understood each other and *listened*. There were no divisions. My wise friend Susan said:

I love the fact that everyone could understand one another's unique voice yet it was not a blending of Esperanto, it was more of an attunement. In today's world we need to find a way to bridge our differences, to stay who we are but to find a structure, like a geodesic dome, to hold all our valued humanity.

Such a dome already exists. Author and theologian Barbara Brown Taylor points out in *Home by Another Way* (1999), that the earth's atmosphere "...separates the air we breathe from the cold vacuum of outer space. Beneath this veil is all the air that ever was...Every time we breathe, we take in what was once some baby's first breath or some dying person's last."

Taylor points to the miracle inherent in Pentecost:

When Jesus let go of his last breath—willing, we believe for the love of us...it did not simply dissipate...It grew, in strength, and in volume, until it was a mighty wind which God sent spinning through an upper room in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost. God wanted to make sure that Jesus' friends were the inheritors of Jesus' breath and it worked.

Pentecost – the birthday of the church—is about igniting, not extinguishing. So instead of singing "Happy Birthday" after which we blow *out* the candles, may we kindle our hearts this day, and always, with these words from the old hymn:

Breathe on me, breath of God; fulfil my heart's desire until
this earthly part of me, glows with your heavenly fire.

"It is no small thing that the Holy Spirit loosened tongues to break down barriers on the birthday of the Church," writes Debie Thomas in *Journey with Jesus*.

In the face of difference, God compelled his people to engage. In the face of fear, Jesus breathed forth peace. Out of the heart of deep difference, God birthed the Church. So happy birthday, sisters and brothers. Receive the Holy Spirit. Together, may we grow into all that Christ longs to pour into us, his Body. AMEN