

Pentecost 2022, St. David's, June 5, Acts 2:1-21 (Elizabeth Felicetti)

What a joy to see red and celebrate the Spirit today. We've been in the season of Easter, but after forty days, Jesus ascended into heaven, and the disciples experienced ten days of a liminal time, an in-between time. Pentecost is what happens at the end of those ten days, when we celebrate the Holy Spirit coming down like the rush of a violent wind with divided tongues like fire appearing among the disciples, a tongue resting on each of them and filling them with the Holy Spirit. The Spirit gave them ability, so that others were able to understand them in their own language.

What ability has the Holy Spirit given you?

What do you think about the Holy Spirit?

I know that a few in our congregation are BFFs with the Holy Spirit, but for other Episcopalians the Holy Spirit an uncomfortable topic, like money. We don't talk about our salaries or pensions or pledges at coffee hours, and we might think of people being filled with the Holy Spirit as people convulsing on the floor, a difficult image when so many of us are embarrassed to sway or raise our hands when we are moved by a song or hymn during worship. Episcopalians just don't do that, right?

Well, Episcopalians do love the Holy Spirit, and some of us are learning to love the Spirit a little later than others. I'm one of those people. When we played the vestry icebreaker "which person of the Trinity are you most drawn to and why," I was always firmly God-the-Father. But the increasing changes brought to the church by the pandemic have truly opened my heart to that wind, that fire, that breath sweeping changes to the church across the world.

In our Acts reading this morning, the disciples, who fifty days before were huddled in fear in an upper room and then after the Ascension were continually in the temple praising God, are again all together when the Spirit comes. They all speak at once, everyone within earshot can understand, some sneer, and then Peter preaches. The sermon lasts longer than our reading this morning, and once he was finished preaching, three thousand converts were baptized.

Now that detail may make us wonder about the Spirit because that's a grand number of spontaneous baptisms. Doesn't the Spirit work in smaller ways, too? While Acts talks about the Spirit as a violent wind, the Spirit is also described as a dove at times, like at Jesus' baptism. We show a dove representing on these red altar hangings as well as our St. David's flag. Doves are not a violent wind. Doves are common, and beautiful.

How many times has the Spirit whispered to you in the past week? If you said none, I wonder if you were truly listening. I don't mean to suggest that you have to go looking for the Spirit in order to find her: not at all. I've learned that the Spirit finds me. Often in quiet conversation,

often with one of you, when you bring up some small thing or a big thing. Or when a child gives me a picture they drew or slide it under my door when I am in my office in conversation with someone. A neighbor being out while I walk by, sparking a conversation addressing spiritual concerns that I have had. Small, pleasant surprises are sometimes the Spirit. Things that secular people call coincidences. Sometimes I recognize the Spirit in something that I feel called to do but don't want to do at first.

A violent wind is more dramatic than a dove, and that's the shape the Spirit sometimes takes too, or fire. I'm excited that we have our fire back this year, but I also hope the kids all understand that this is not real fire. Real fire is dangerous and not something we can play with.

Faith can be dangerous too, can't it? In *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* by C.S. Lewis, Lucy aka Mr. Beaver if Aslan, the lion, is safe. No, Mr. Beaver says. He's not a tame lion. Of course he isn't safe. But he's good. That sums up the Spirit, too.

Wind is another word that often gets translated as Spirit. But the translation that means the most to me anymore is "breath." I breathe differently now than I did three years ago, which was the last time we had an unrestricted Pentecost Sunday service. I know I'm not the only one. My breathing was compromised by lung cancer and then by having a lobe of my left lung removed, but others who suffered COVID have had their breathing messed up as well. Sometimes I listen to recordings of myself and am bothered that I can hear myself inhaling and exhaling. That used to be a lot less noticeable.

But maybe I'm noticing my breath now because I am more attuned to the Spirit. I love the metaphor of breath for the Holy Spirit because breath gives us life. In the second chapter of Genesis, when God created Adam from dust, God breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and Adam became a living being.

Breath is not something we can see, but its sounds can be soothing, like listening to a spouse or baby or a parent or grandparent breathe while they sleep. I even find it soothing sometimes to hear Pepper softly snore. And the Spirit can soothe us, too, even though the Spirit, like Aslan, is not safe. Not safe, but sometimes soothing. The Spirit gives us life. The Spirit gives the whole church life.

On Pentecost, we remember that the Holy Spirit animates all of us. Connie and I watched what we call church TV—that is, the security cameras, that we can see from our offices—as Hector and David and Adrian sweated in the 94 degree heat last Thursday taking apart our labyrinth stone by stone and painstakingly levelling it using a tamper—a tamper, in ninety-four degrees. At one point I went out and told Hector that I was afraid they would pass out and he said, "why?" He said his main concern was getting the stones back together and said I might have to

hopscotch instead of walk the labyrinth in the future. I wished the Holy Spirit would descend on them with a chilling wind, but that didn't happen.

The most beautiful parts of the church coming together are driven by the Spirit. You all get a chance to participate this morning. After this we will share a meal together: a meal that is possible because of all of us being stirred to action to make a real meal together for the first time since Lent 2020. Sharon is a LEM so we will need to come together to set up and clean up.

Today we come together like the disciples did and we celebrate the Spirit animating all of us, the people of God. We will feed each other, and after we are fed, the Spirit sends us out into the world. How will you feed others after you leave here today?