

Pentecost, Year A

Numbers 11:24-30

Psalm 104:25-35, 37

Acts 2:1-21

John 7:37-39

Good morning, and
welcome, welcome, welcome
to St. Anne's Episcopal Church.

Fiery streamers are in the air.
Everyone is decked in red.
Water slides are on the front lawn
for the eighth annual
"Holy Ghost Weenie Roast."

All of this can mean only one thing:
today is Pentecost,
and it is *so good!*

For those of you who might not know,
Pentecost is a big deal around here.
Originally a Jewish holiday—
always fifty days after the Passover—
our Jewish forbears celebrated two things on this day:
first, they celebrated the annual wheat harvest,
and second—and more importantly—
they celebrated the giving of the Law
by God to Moses on Mt. Sinai.

But today means a lot to us Christians, too,
because—as we heard in the book of Acts—
it was on this day
that the Holy Spirit of God
descended like wind and fire
upon the heads of the disciples,
and sent them out
with bravery and boldness
to proclaim the Gospel
to the entire known world.

Until this day,
all those disciples,
all those apostles
all those followers of Jesus,
had been cowering in their room—

tentative and unsure,
hesitant and afraid—
without their Jesus there to guide them
and to tell them what to do.
That is, until the Holy Spirit came along
and whacked ‘em like a flaming 2x4,
and boy did the Spirit whack ‘em good.

So, on a day that was once
all about the giving of God’s Law
to just a select group of people,
who made up only one nation . . .
God turned everything upside down today
and made it about
the giving of God’s Grace
to *all* people,
to *every* nation,
every language,
every tribe.

Today is one of those days
when we learn
beyond the shadow of a doubt
that God is for *everyone*.

And that, my friends, is good news.

Now, on certain Pentecosts in years past,
some of you have heard me quote
one of the early Church fathers, St. Cyril of Jerusalem,
who once said that perhaps the Holy Spirit
can be described with more than just fire.
For all our red vestments and fiery streamers—
for all that the book of Acts says
about tongues of flame and rushing wind—
maybe, says Cyril,
maybe the Holy Spirit
is better described as *water*.

What he means is this:
The Spirit
is the Spirit
is the Spirit.
It does not change,
just like
water

is water
is water.

(I know, I know.
Water can change into ice and steam.
Just roll with the metaphor, wouldya?)

But when water falls down from the sky,
it is absorbed by every living thing.
It fortifies the earth and makes it strong.
When it rains,
the lily becomes beautifully white.
The rose becomes dazzling red.
The hydrangea becomes all shades
of magenta, and purple, and blue.

And so it is with the Spirit, says Cyril.
When the Holy Spirit rains down upon us,
the Spirit fortifies us and makes us strong.
When the Spirit rains,
the coward becomes brave;
the sinner becomes redeemed;
the lost becomes found,
and welcomed,
and loved.

In just a few moments,
you and I are going to stand up,
and we are going to gather together in that love—
a love that we have not manufactured,
a love that we do not own,
a love that rains down upon us from outside us
as a pure gift—
and with that love
we will surround a little guy
named Grady Thompson
and bring him to the waters of baptism.

Grady is the son of Seth and Kate,
but in just a few minutes
as we baptize him
and the Holy Spirit
pours down his grace upon him
and upon all the rest of us,
Grady will be filled, fortified, transformed.
You probably won't even be able to see it happen,

just as it's nearly impossible to watch a lily grow,
but in that moment,
he'll no longer be Seth and Kate's son.
He will be God's own beloved child,
and a little brother in Christ
to us all.

Folks, this is what Pentecost is all about.
Today is about the indescribable Spirit of God:
the One who, like water,
washes over us and in us to make us clean;
the One who, like fire,
burns within us to make us strong;
the One who, like the Love of God itself,
infuses us and makes us one.

Today is the feast of Pentecost,
and it is
so good!
so good!
so good!