

## Pentecost, Year C

---

Genesis 11:1-9

Psalm 104:25-35, 37

Acts 2:1-21

John 14:8-17, 25-27

---

Good morning and happy Pentecost!

Some of you may not remember this,  
but my very first Sunday here  
was on Pentecost of 2009,  
which means today marks the culmination  
of thirteen years together.

Out of curiosity I went back  
and looked at my first sermon  
from my first Sunday at St. Anne's  
on that first Pentecost together,  
and I have to say: it wasn't bad!

It was full of hope and possibility,  
and it's remarkable to see how  
so much of what we dreamed about back then  
really has come to pass.  
God has been so good to us.

At the beginning of that sermon, though,  
I confessed to you that I had not been  
entirely sure what to talk about,  
so I had called some of my older,  
wiser priest friends for their advice.

“Listen,” I told them,  
“I’m about to go to  
this amazing congregation  
where they have taken a chance  
and called a young rector.  
My first Sunday is Pentecost.  
What do I say to these people?”

One of my mentors said,  
“Hey man, look. It’s Pentecost.  
They will have years to get to know you,  
so do not get caught up  
in talking about yourself.  
Just preach Pentecost,  
and the rest will work itself out.”

But then another said,  
“Lonnie, remember:  
these people do not know you.  
They’re going to be curious.  
They’re going to want to know  
who you are,  
what you care about,  
and why you’ve come to be with them.  
So don’t worry about Pentecost.  
You just tell them about yourself.”

Finally, I called a third friend to break the tie.  
He listened attentively, then paused, and said,  
“Well Lonnie,  
I don’t know what to tell you,  
but you just try your best  
not to equate your coming to St. Anne’s  
with the coming of the Holy Spirit,  
and you should be okay!”

Duly noted:  
I am not the third Person of the Trinity.  
That has served as good advice  
for thirteen years.

But as I went on to say back then,  
I go on to say today:  
with all we could talk about,  
what we *should* talk about  
is the Holy Spirit.

\* \* \*

Pentecost is the day we just heard about  
in the book of Acts:  
the day the disciples were  
all huddled together in fear  
when all of a sudden—WHOOSH—  
the Holy Spirit came pouring down from above,  
set their heads on fire,  
and sent them out preaching in Jerusalem  
where miraculously every person  
could hear them and understand  
in their own native language.

This is the day the Church got the Spirit.  
This is the day the Church found its courage.  
This is the day the Church was born.

Every year we celebrate  
by singing songs about the Spirit,  
having fun at the Holy Ghost Weenie Roast,  
and wearing red, the color of the Holy Spirit and of fire.

But as much as I love all this fiery imagery,  
there was an early Church father  
who had a different idea  
about the Holy Spirit.

He lived in the fourth century,  
and his name was Cyril of Jerusalem.

St. Cyril looked at all this red—  
all this talk of wind, and fire, and flame—  
and he said, “Eh, I don’t think so.  
I think *water* is a better symbol for the Holy Spirit.  
Water and rain.”

St. Cyril said if you look at the rain  
when it falls from the sky,  
you see that it’s the same everywhere you go.  
Water is water is water, no matter what.  
But when that water falls to the earth,  
it’s absorbed and becomes just the thing  
each plant needs it to be.

In the lily, the rain becomes  
beautifully, perfectly white.  
In the rose, it becomes dazzling red.  
And in the grasses of the field,  
the rain becomes green and lush and strong.

Rain adapts itself to whatever  
each living thing needs it to be.  
And so it is—says St. Cyril—with the Holy Spirit.

That’s not a bad way of explaining  
what happened at that very first Pentecost.  
It was the same Holy Spirit  
that poured out onto all those disciples,  
and everyone there was given  
exactly what they needed.  
More importantly, everyone listening

heard exactly what they needed to hear—  
in their own native language—  
to learn of the saving deeds  
of Jesus Christ.

If he were here today,  
St. Cyril of Jerusalem would remind us  
that there is only one Spirit,  
and God's Spirit never, ever, ever changes.  
But he would also say that  
if you and I hang around the Holy Spirit  
long enough to take a good, deep drink,  
we soon find that the one Spirit  
is really good at giving each of us  
exactly what we need  
to live without fear  
and to make Christ known  
to all the world.

This was good news for those early disciples,  
and it is good news for you.

Before Jesus left to go back to the Father,  
he had promised the disciples  
that the Holy Spirit would come  
and take care of them,  
but they had no clue  
what that meant.

They were waiting.  
Their future was unknown.  
They were afraid.

Well, we know what that feels like, don't we?

Last week a member of St. Anne's  
told me something  
that they had heard  
that someone else had heard  
that someone else had told them  
that someone else thought might be true  
about how things may unfold  
as y'all begin the process  
of bringing on an interim  
and searching for a new rector.

What mattered was not whether  
what they heard was true.  
(Part of it was, part of it wasn't.)

What mattered was that  
it was filled with anxiety.  
And I said so.

The person talking to me said,  
“Well Lonnie, you know how it goes:  
waiting  
plus the unknown  
equals fear.”

That's an astute observation.

Waiting  
plus the unknown  
equals fear.

That's exactly where the disciples were  
before Pentecost hit.

But here, my friends, is the difference.  
In fact, here are two differences:  
one practical,  
one divine.

The practical difference  
is that you have been through this before,  
and you are not alone.

The disciples did not have  
decades of trust built up,  
systems established,  
and shared leadership in place.  
You do.

The disciples did not have  
a bishop who cares  
and a canon to the ordinary  
whose very job it is  
to help churches make smooth transitions,  
who has already met with your vestry twice,  
and who will come to preach and meet all of you  
soon after I'm gone.  
You do.

The disciples did not have  
a [Transition Handbook](#)  
on their diocesan website  
that lays out in good order  
how the process will unfold.  
You do.

So brothers and sisters, be at peace.  
You are not the first to go through this.

But far more important  
than the practical differences  
is the divine difference.

**Before Pentecost,  
the disciples did not have  
the Holy Spirit.  
*You do.***

**Waiting  
plus the unknown  
may equal fear,  
but  
waiting  
plus the unknown  
*plus the Holy Spirit,*  
always equals hope.**

Repeat that after me:

Waiting . . .  
plus the unknown . . .  
plus the Holy Spirit . . .  
always equals hope.

So buck up, buttercup.  
Y'all know the Holy Spirit.  
You see the Spirit show up here every Sunday.

Otherwise, you would not  
come forward to the rail every Sunday  
expecting Communion and healing.

Otherwise, you would not  
leave here every Sunday  
filled with a little more purpose  
and a little more hope.

Otherwise, you would not  
love one another the way you do  
despite the world's best efforts  
to divide everyone up by their differences.

All of that is the work of the Holy Spirit,  
who is constantly pouring out upon you,  
giving you everything you need  
to live without fear  
and to make Christ known  
to all the world.

\* \* \*

So while today is not my last Sunday  
and you'll have to wait for June 19  
for my sad, sorry, sappy goodbye,  
I will at least tell you today  
my prayer for you.

My prayer for you, St. Anne's  
is that you will let the rain of God's grace  
pour over you continually;

that you will soak it up,  
drink it up,  
and be made strong;

that you longtimers  
will remember and tell the stories  
of how God has always been here for St. Anne's  
and has always seen you through;

that you newcomers  
will dig in  
and make this your home  
and bring new strength and vision,  
new diversity and joy  
to this church that you already love;

that you in the online balcony  
who live nearby and have the health to do so  
will get out of your slippers and bathrobes  
and come on back to the pews  
where you are needed and missed;

that you who are strong  
will help the weak;

that you who are healthy  
will tend the sick;

that you who *can* be here  
will care for those who truly *can't*;

that you who are old  
will raise up the young;

that you who are *in*  
will make new and loving ways  
for those who are *out*;

and that none of you  
will ever, ever, ever forget  
that 99% of this stuff  
is not and never has been up to you;

it's up to the Holy Spirit  
who is always pouring out God's love  
and always ready to fill you to the brim.  
You just have to be an open and willing vessel.

\* \* \*

So on this Pentecost Sunday  
as we celebrate thirteen years together,  
looking back to the promises of the early Church  
and forward to futures yet unknown,  
we give thanks  
for all that was,  
and all that is,  
and all that is still yet to be.

And we soak up every drop  
of the Spirit in this place,  
never forgetting that—repeat after me—  
waiting . . .  
plus the unknown . . .  
plus the Holy Spirit . . .  
always equals hope.

Amen.