

June 5, 2022, 2022 - Pentecost Sunday

Litany for Pentecost

P - Spirit of the living God, who has been promised, we pray,
C - Come, Holy Spirit!
P - Spirit of the living Christ, who will not leave us alone, we pray,
C - Come, Holy Spirit!
P - Spirit of Pentecost, who continues to hover over creation, we pray,
C - Come, Holy Spirit!
P - Spirit who breathes life, who brings life, who *is* life, we pray,
C - Come, Holy Spirit!
P - Open us to your presence, gracious Spirit.
C - Amen!

Prayer of the Day

God our creator, the resurrection of your Son offers life to all the peoples of earth. By your Holy Spirit, kindle in us the fire of your love; empower our lives for service, and our tongues for praise, through Jesus Christ, our Saviour and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Second Reading - Romans 8:14-17

For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, "Abba! Father!", it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ--if, in fact, we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him.

Sermon

I saw a cartoon this last week. It's the Pentecost story from the book of Acts. The disciples are together; they each have tongues of flame over their heads; they are celebrating the presence of God with them in a new way. In the next frame, a sprinkler system over their heads has been activated by the fire and doused the flames. ☺

We Lutherans can, without meaning to, fall into the role of being holy sprinkler systems. We get nervous if the Spirit is allowed too much freedom.

We absolutely recognize that we have experienced the Spirit! We have encountered the Spirit in the waters of baptism, in the bread and wine of communion, in the reading of the bible, in our times of prayer together, in our times of caring for our neighbours and community, and in our attempts to care for the world. We strongly affirm that the Spirit of God was, is, and will be in the middle of all these times.

But Lutherans pride themselves on being a Church of Good Order! When we remember the story of Genesis, for instance, we emphasize the Spirit creating order out of the chaos. We tend to gloss over, or even actively try to *forget*, that in the Pentecost story, the Spirit takes our order and our structure and our comfort and our predictability, and creates chaos again; a holy chaos, in which all kinds of new and scary possibilities are suddenly available.

Annie Dillard is a retired author, who, among other things, wrote Teaching a Stone to Talk in 1982. This is a quote from that book.

Why do people in church seem like cheerful, brainless tourists on a packaged tour of the Absolute? ... Does anyone have the foggiest idea what sort of power we blithely invoke? Or, as I suspect, does no one believe a word of it? The churches are children playing on the floor with

their chemistry sets, mixing up a batch of TNT to kill a Sunday morning. It is madness to wear ladies' straw hats and velvet gloves to church; we should all be wearing crash helmets. Ushers should issue life preservers and signal flares; they should lash us to our pews. For the sleeping god may wake someday and take offense, or the waking god may draw us to where we can never return.

Annie Dillard reminds us, as the Pentecost story reminds us, that the life of faith is an adventure. It is anything **but** calm; it is anything **but** safe; it is anything **but** predictable. It is a holy roller coaster ride, in which we cannot see where we are going, are thrown up and down, back and forth, side to side, and frequently all we can do is hang on and trust that the seatbelts will hold!

I'd like to tell you a story of a woman named Myrtle, who was a member of the church Deb and I were with before we came to Nova Scotia.

To all outward appearance, Myrtle would be described a "a lady." She was always well dressed, she was polite, she always had a good word for people, she always listened when people spoke to her. You quickly determined that she was a great person to be around. That did not change after you got to know her, but you **also** came to realize that she had a spark in her that added a great deal of "depth" to her personality.

Myrtle's husband had died when she was 50, and he had done all the driving. So she learned to drive very quickly. And I mean that in both ways! She got her license right away, but she also drove very quickly. Several people told me about their experience of having Myrtle drive them somewhere.... Once! They never asked her to drive them again....

When she turned 60, she decided that a driver's license wasn't enough, so she went out and got her **motorcycle** license. And when she turned 70, she decided that **that** wasn't enough, either, so she started taking **flying** lessons! She never did take her final flying test to actually get her pilot's license, but she completed the course, and decided that was enough.

When she was in her early 80s, she was diagnosed with cancer, and the testing revealed that nothing could be done. But it was no surprise that Myrtle faced that challenge the way she had faced the rest of life - straight ahead, looking it straight in the eyes. She ask me to come over to talk about her funeral.

We talked about hymns, we talked about readings, we talked about who would speak. She even told me what the text of the sermon would be, **and** what I would say!

The text she wanted was John 3:16 **and** 17. John 3:16, we all know, and we can probably say it together.

For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.

But I wonder how many of us know John 3:17?

*Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to **condemn** the world, but in order that the world might be **saved** through him.*

And Myrtle told me why she wanted those words read, and why she wanted me to preach on those words. She had two very good friends, who happened to be lesbians. They had not been to church in decades; it was too painful for them. She knew there was no way they would ever become regular church goers, but she knew they **would** come to her funeral. So she wanted them to hear that they were **loved**, and she wanted them to hear that **in church**.

It's pretty remarkable, actually. She didn't want her funeral to be about her. She wanted it to be about the love God has for the people who were **attending** the funeral.

One final story about Myrtle. She even ordered her own cake for her funeral reception. What she didn't know is that it didn't come out exactly the way she had requested. What she **got** on her

cake, in 4-inch high blue icing letters, was, “Alleluia!” What she *wanted* on her cake, in 4-inch high blue icing letters, was, “Alleluia! Here I go!”

Myrtle was a great example of someone who looked life straight in the eyes, who took it on its own terms, and who, at the same time, never forgot who she was. No matter what happened, no matter what she did (or didn't do), she was able to hold on to the promise given in her baptism, that she was, and would always *be*, a child of God. And being a child of God allowed here to engage in all kinds of adventures, even if the people around her didn't always get it, or understand what she was doing, or why she was doing it.

For me, she is a wonderful example of Pentecost living, of travelling through life surrounded by the energizing, liberating love of God, of being inspired by the flame of Pentecost which, regardless of our fears or hesitations, will never be put out.

I don't know if she knew the passage from Romans 8 which we read a few minutes ago, but I think she would have liked it.

For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption.

Now, I'm not saying that all of us have to go out and get our motorcycle licenses or sign up for flying lessons next week! But let's let Myrtle be an example for us of Pentecost living, in which fear does not set the agenda, but the love of adventure does. Let's let Myrtle free us from always needing to be about “good order,” so we can embrace a little chaos every now and then. Let's let Myrtle reinforce the baptismal promise for us, that we are all God's children, surrounded and inspired by the Spirit of Pentecost, whatever adventures come our way.

We, like Annie Dillard, like Myrtle, have been set on fire by the Holy Spirit of Pentecost. And that is a flame which ain't never gonna be put out! Amen.

Prayers of the People

A - Celebrating the new life we have received, we offer our prayers for our world, our neighbours, and ourselves.

[Short pause]

A - Spirit of adventure, you free us to jump into life, to look for new options, to experience the joy of creativity. Give us the desire to take the leap. God who leads us into life,

C - Hear our prayer.

A - Spirit of risk, remind us that it is ok to fail, to be unsuccessful, to not reach our goals. Give us the faith to embrace the trying. Give us the will to take the chance. God who leads us into life,

C - Hear our prayer.

A - Spirit of exploration, open us to the journey of discovering who we are, who we have been, who we might become. Give us the assurance of your love accompanying us on our way to our true selves.

God who leads us into life,

C - Hear our prayer.

A - Spirit of ministry, release your church from the boxes we have constructed - for you, for ourselves, for the world. Liberate us from our expectations, that we may welcome fresh possibilities. God who leads us into life,

C - Hear our prayer.

A - Spirit of openness, you come in spite of our limitations, proclaiming your loving presence with all. Open our hands and hearts to share your presence with others in their isolation, in their conflicts, in their illness and in their questions. We especially remember those we name before you.

[Long pause]

God who leads us into life,

C - Hear our prayer.

A - Spirit of adventure, you free us to jump into life, to explore divergent paths, to experience the wonder of doing things differently. Give us the desire to take the leap. God who leads us into life,

C - Hear our prayer.

P - We offer these prayers, and the prayers we carry in our hearts, trusting in your abundant and ever-present mercy; through Jesus Christ our living Lord.

C - Amen.