

Pentecost Day A (6/4/17)

Acts 2:1-21

Psalm 104:24-34, 35b

1 Corinthians 12:3b-13

John 7:37-39

We usually conceive of the Holy Spirit as fire, or wind, or a dove. But scripture also envisions the Spirit as water, a rushing stream of grace and life-giving power that flows from the person of the risen Christ and through his followers. At Pentecost, the Spirit is like a flash flood,¹ poured out on the church to refresh us for the work of creation and renewal in a parched world.

Red is probably the first thing that comes to mind when you think of Pentecost. Red signifies the fire of the Holy Spirit rushing in to rest on the heads of the disciples in Jerusalem and enable them to tell the news of Jesus' cross and resurrection to people who speak a world of languages. Red is bright and bold, evoking the disciples' strong sense of purpose even in Jesus' earthly absence. "...you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you," he promises prior to his departure, "and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the Earth."² A flash of red erupts at the church's inception and propels it into the future.

I wonder, however, if we ought to mark the festival of Pentecost this year instead with the color blue. The liturgical purist in me recoils at the idea, yet I'm struck by scripture assigned for today that envisions the Holy Spirit not as fire, but as *water*: "I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and [your

¹ See "Deserts," *Planet Earth*, BBC, 40:20-42:27.

² Acts: 1:8.

young people] shall prophesy, and [your elders] shall dream dreams.” “You send forth your Spirit, and [all living things] are created; and so you renew the face of the [ground].” “For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body... and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.” “Let anyone who is thirsty come to me, and let the one who believes in me drink. As the scripture has said, ‘Out of the believer’s heart shall flow rivers of living water.’”

Pentecost is blue.

We usually conceive of the Holy Spirit as fire, or wind, or a dove. But **this Pentecost, I invite you to imagine the Holy Spirit as a flash flood, a rushing stream of grace and life-giving power that flows from the person of the risen Christ and through his followers to a parched world.**

The image of water is sacred throughout the Bible. Think of Moses and the Israelites in the desert, their desperate thirst quenched by water from the rock.³ Think of the prophet Isaiah’s promise: “The LORD will guide you continually, and satisfy your needs in parched places... and you shall be like a watered garden, like a spring of water, whose waters never fail.”⁴ Think of the decree of the prophet Amos: “Take away from me the noise of your songs... But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.”⁵ Think of Jesus’ offer to the Samaritan woman at the well: “...those

³ Exodus 17:1-7.

⁴ Isaiah 58:11.

⁵ Amos 5:23-24.

who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty [again]. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life.”⁶ And, think of the dream at the end of Revelation, the promise of a world renewed in the fullness of time: “Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city.”⁷

Water is quite literally the power of salvation, the power of renewal, and scripture is keenly aware of its role in creating and sustaining life. But the depiction of the Holy Spirit in watery terms in our Gospel from John today takes the metaphor to the next step. “Let anyone who is thirsty come to me, and let the one who believes in me drink,” Jesus invites. **The Spirit he gives is the fundamental source of life, the floodwater that fills the desert pool, so to speak. But that Spirit also involves us in its life-giving work: “Out of *the believer’s heart* shall flow rivers of living water.”** Like the dry river bed that explodes with life after a flash flood, we soak up the Spirit not to hoard God’s goodness, but in order that we might flourish as a source of hope for those who thirst for it.

This is the privilege of Pentecost, that followers of Jesus not only receive the gift of the Holy Spirit, but we become the power of salvation, the power of renewal, for others. We are made to drink of one Spirit, to

⁶ John 4:14. See also 19:34.

⁷ Revelation 22:1-2.

borrow the Apostle Paul's words, yet we employ our many gifts for the sake of the common good. In the life of baptism, God stirs up in us the gift of the Holy Spirit that we might "proclaim the good news of God in Christ through word and deed, ...serve all people, following the example of Jesus, and... strive for justice and peace in all the Earth."⁸

After all, **the Earth is strewn with deserts, parched places where life is hard and hope is thin.** Some of these deserts are literal, places where water, food, healthcare, and other basic necessities are hard to come by. Some deserts are figurative, circumstances that are dry in other ways – individual lives beleaguered by feelings of emptiness, households weighed down by strained relationships, congregations struggling to discern God's purpose for them, disengaged communities. In each case, we trust the Holy Spirit to rush in like a flash flood and renew the face of the ground. But, we also expect to become instruments of the Spirit's reviving work, flowing out toward others, offering them our gifts, and receiving theirs in return.⁹

Dear church, red or blue, **Pentecost is a festival to mark not only God's gift of the Spirit that creates and sustains us, but also to consider again how that Spirit is sweeping us up into the work of creation and renewal.** So, drink the Spirit in today. Let rivers of living water flow from your heart, and never let those waters fail.

⁸ *Evangelical Lutheran Worship, Assembly Edition, 237.*

⁹ See Stephen B. Boyd, in *Feasting on the Word, Year A, Vol. 3, 24.*