



SAINT LUKE'S

FIRE FROM HEAVEN AND LIVING WATER

PENTECOST SUNDAY

YEAR A

ACTS 2:1-21

PSALM 104:25-35, 37

1 CORINTHIANS 12:3B-13

JOHN 20:19-23 OR 7:37-39

A SERMON BY THE REV. POSEY KRAKOWSKY

JUNE 4, 2017

O fire of the breathe
Living vine for every created thing:
Holy you are, you give life to all things
Holy, a balm for those wounded by risks
Holy, a cleansing ointment for nasty wounds

O whiff of holiness
O fire of love
O sweet taste in the breast
and sweet aroma of strength
flooding the heart.

translation: Clair McPherson 2006

These are the words of 12th century Christian mystic, Hildegarde of Bingen, describing the Holy Spirit.

Today is Pentecost ~ the day of both living water and fire from heaven. This is the day that celebrates the beginning of the church. It is the last step of our long journey through this Easter season to the creation of the Body of Christ. Today, as we baptize many new wiggly Christians, we will be welcoming them into that body, and in doing so, recalling not only our own baptisms, but also the call to live out our baptismal covenant daily.

Our passage from John today comes from chapter 7 ~ when Jesus and the disciples are at the end of the celebration of the festival of Booths ~ of

Sukkot. In John's gospel, Jesus speaks these words on the last day of the festival ~ the 8th day, the culminating day. His reference to living water relates to the water from the rock that kept the people of Jacob alive during their 40 year sojourn in the desert near Sinai. The identification of Pentecost with Sukkot is important, because Sukkot is a festival that takes the worshippers out of the temple and literally into booths ~ temporary structures that recall their years of wandering.

Author and Rabbi Irving Greenberg explains:

By moving into a Sukkah for a week, Jews demythologize solid walls and controllable security. It is not a renunciation of self protection but a recognition of its limits. One should accept vulnerability and live more deeply, rather than build thick walls that are intended to protect us, but (instead) end up cutting us off from life.¹

Sukkot celebrates the experience of temporary physical rootlessness because when we are rootless, *we are reminded that our true grounding is in God.*

As we heard in the reading from the book of Acts, at Pentecost, the Holy Spirit comes and pours her spirit upon all flesh, tongues of fire rest on each of us. Just as it was for the Israelites in the desert - the location of God's glory is no longer in the temple but in and among the bodies of the assembly. The body of Christ is now within not only every human person, but also in the community, in the communion ~ in the space between us. Ecofeminist theologian Ivone Gebara argues for the importance of

¹ Greenberg, Irving. *The Jewish Way*, New York: Simon and Schuster, 1988. page 100.

affirming the collective dimension of “person” – in this collective dimension the most important thing is neither autonomy nor individuality, but relatedness.² To her, relatedness is *the primary reality*. In other words, inherent in the idea of communion between 2 is the notion of 3. In my relationship with you, we each exist, but there is also something in between – a third space which we share and which allows us to have breathing room to be ourselves even though we are together. That third space is a place of creativity and wonder. And it too, is the dwelling place of the Holy Spirit.

This idea of relationally also connects us to the cosmos – to all of creation. Franciscan mystic and writer Richard Rohr wrote that “Francis, a living contemplative, walked the roads of Italy in the thirteenth century shouting, “The whole world is our cloister!””

Rohr continues: “By narrowing the scope of salvation to words, theories, churches, and select groups, we have led many people not to pay any attention to the miracles that are all around them all the time here and now. Either this world is the very “Body of God” or we have little evidence of God at all. The early Franciscans said the first Bible was not the written Bible, but creation itself, the cosmos.”³

We see this connection to the cosmos illustrated in our texts today. The Book of Acts likens the Holy Spirit to fire and to the rush of wind; John’s Gospel likens her to rivers of living water. This spirit is an ever changing, restless one, one that reminds me of the constantly flowing dance of the

² Gebara, Ivone. *Longing for Running Water*, Minneapolis, Augsburg Press, 1999. page 83.

³ Richard Rohr daily meditation newsletter: <http://email.cac.org/t/ViewEmail/d/9CA3C75237895200/4439AFF8EC7A35E7B4B1B1F623478121>

molecules that make up water. In the fluidity of water, we see it finds its way through the smallest of spaces and can conform itself to the most unlikely shapes. In the persistence of steam, we see it heat food, heal lungs, and make loud noises. In the resistance of ice, we see it create surfaces for skating, lower fevers and cracks rocks. Water's three forms symbolize the Spirit's ability to change and adjust to any situation in order to find the way for love and the community to thrive. For the water of which Jesus speaks is no ordinary water. Like the amniotic fluid in which we are gestated, it is the living water – the water of Grace, the Grace that feeds us, body and soul. It is the water in which we, as Christians, choose to be reborn every day.

In the baptismal liturgy, the role of water in creation and liberation is stressed through reference to the Genesis and Exodus stories in the Hebrew Bible. The liturgy goes on to relate it also to Jesus' baptism by the Holy Spirit and by John, making clear the connection of the work of God becoming incarnate through the actions of human hands. This liturgy reminds us that God's love for us is in the embodied acts of nurturing we do daily with water, here and now, to each other. It reminds us that if we want clean water, we have a responsibility to care for this planet – the mother who nurtures us and gives us life. It models, through human actions, how we are loved by God, and how we love God in return by loving each other. We humans are longing for this water, this water of Grace. It is this water which serves as a balm for the wounds we so often encounter as we walk through life.

So today, on Pentecost, it is especially appropriate that we have baptisms – the initiation rite that welcomes us into the Christian community and celebrates interconnectedness and relationality. The universal acts of nurturing a child in the womb of water, cleansing each other with water, and sharing the gift of water are all present in the baptismal font. And so is the call to us to do God’s work in response to the gift of Grace.

I would like to conclude with a prayer from Frank Griswold

Gracious God, through the waters of baptism and the working of the Holy Spirit, you have made me one with Christ in his death and resurrection. I have become a limb and member of Christ’s risen body, the Church. You have sealed and marked me by the Holy Spirit as Christ’s own forever and called me to share in his eternal priesthood. Sustain and strengthen me with your Spirit day by day. Give me an inquiring and discerning heart, the courage to will and persevere, a spirit to know and to love you, and the gift of joy and wonder in all your works. In the face of difficulty and distress help me to remember that my life is not my own but the life that Christ lives in me, and that your power working in me can do infinitely more than I can ask or imagine. To you be glory in the Church and in Christ Jesus, now and forever. *Amen*

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