

Pentecost A 2020

Acts 2:1-21

Psalm 104:25-35, 37

1 Corinthians 12:3b-13

John 7:37-39

Even on Pentecost,
These images of fire bring no comfort,
But only distress,
Maybe anger –
Maybe fear.

Flames tower high over burning police stations
And restaurants and businesses
As outraged citizens gather in protest
And others join the throng.
Anger – justifiable anger
And frustration and grief –
And, admittedly, outbreaks of violence
That are harder to justify –
fury flares up
as we witness another death.
Another unarmed black man
Dies in the hands of police.
Before that,
Another unarmed black man
Gunned down by vigilantes.
And an unarmed black woman
Is killed by police in her home.
These are the deaths that are making headlines.
There are more.
More deaths,
More injustice.

An unarmed black man watching birds
Films a white woman
As she calls the police
To accuse him falsely.
To ask the question
That's never worth asking:
What was she thinking?
Didn't she know
He would have been arrested
And could have been killed?

And so the fires burn.
There may perhaps be moments
When some of us indulge the fond hope
That the global crisis of the pandemic
Is bringing us together.
But alongside that hope
Is a harsh truth:
The pandemic sharpens the focus,
And magnifies the effects,
Of the gross inequities and injustices of our systems,
Our country, and the world.

And so anger flares up,
And the fires burn.
Crowds surging through cities across the country.
Shots fired outside the state capitol
And public buildings vandalized
Here in Denver.
Curfew last night and tonight.

Flames and smoke billowing over our cities.
Even on Pentecost –
Especially on Pentecost –
These images of fire,
This experience of fire,
Is no sign of the power and presence of the Holy One.

Where is the God
Who has promised to be with us always?
Who descends, on this day,
As a flame that enlivens, enlightens,
And gathers divided peoples into one?

Where is God?
God is here, on this day
As on every day.

But perhaps, in this moment,
On this day,
As fires smolder
and disease continues to burn through the peoples of the earth,
perhaps, this Pentecost,
we might celebrate an image other than fire.
Another image that helps us understand
the power of God breaking into our lives.

Living water flowing from an open heart.

Yes, the Holy Spirit comes as fire.

The Holy Spirit comes as wind.

But remember this today:

the Holy Spirit is water,

flowing over us,

quenching our unslakable thirst –

our thirst for hope,

for healing,

our hope for the renewal of a world on fire.

The Holy Spirit is the rippling of the water

When life begins

At the dawn of creation.

The Holy Spirit is the gushing of the water

From the rock split in the desert

When the people of the Exodus were dying of thirst.

The Holy Spirit is the stirring of the water

With healing power

When Jesus calls the lame to get up

and walk into a new life.

The Holy Spirit

Is the flowing of the water

From the open side of the Holy One

At the moment of his death.

The Holy Spirit comes no matter what.

To an empty world.

To a cranky discouraged people

Who want to turn back to their old life.

To sick and broken bodies

Without hope.

To the place of death,

Hidden, waiting, ready to reveal the glory of God.

The Holy Spirit is water,

The essence of life.

If you are thirsty today –

Thirsty for justice,

Thirsty for truth,

Thirsty for freedom from anxiety,

Thirsty for hope,

The Holy Spirit who arrives all over again today

Will quench your thirst.

But be ready.
The water is no more easy to take
Than the fire.
The water,
Like the fire,
Means change.

When Moses split the rock in the desert
And the water gushed forth,
That meant there was no going back.
Once the children of Israel had drunk the water
Flowing from the rock,
they did not stop until they reached the promised land.
They still complained, and quarreled,
Grew weary,
Rebelled.
But they kept going,
And received the revelation of the law.
They became a people.

As the water gushed from a split in the living rock
And set the people on their journey,
As the water gushed when the side of Jesus
Was split open
At the moment of his death,
Opening the way of life for all,
So we might be broken open in this moment.

The Holy Spirit is the breaking open of our hearts.
The Holy Spirit is action.
The Holy Spirit is an event.

The Holy Spirit is the breaking of hearts
And the binding of broken and scattered people
Into one broken and gathered body.

The Holy Spirit is the joyful clamoring of voices,
A wild, exuberant outpouring of voices,
Voices that include everyone,
Of every color, from every land,
Of every gender,
Every age.
No one is left out
When the Holy Spirit speaks.

The Holy Spirit is a diversity of gifts,
And a unity of love.
The Holy Spirit is speaking and listening,
Healing and hoping.
Where every gift is valued,
And each contributes to the whole,
The Holy Spirit is at work.

So how will we know the Holy Spirit now?
How will we know the Holy Spirit
Pouring from our open hearts?

The Holy Spirit will be us living in this new world.
This new world where though we are apart,
Everything depends on us coming together.
We can't sit here just waiting for it to be over,
Waiting for things to get better.
Waiting for racism to go away
Or the pandemic to go away
Or the election to go smoothly all on its own.
We can't just sit here,
Because there is work to do now.

The Holy Spirit will be us, doing the work.
The Holy Spirit will be us,
Making this radical change:
Learning to put the marginalized,
The falsely accused,
The victims of our systems
At the center of our concern,
And making the choices
That conform to that value.

The Holy Spirit will be us,
Still the church when we are not in the church.

The Holy Spirit will be us,
Confident that living water is flowing,
Even when the baptismal font is shut.

The Holy Spirit will be us,
Filled to overflowing with the abundance of God,
even when we are absent from God's table.

The Holy Spirit will be us,
Overcoming division,

Acting as healers,
Offering ourselves out of the fullness of our broken hearts.

The Holy Spirit is us becoming a people of hope.

Fires are burning.
The Holy Spirit is now.