

Pentecost C
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St. Barnabas Bainbridge

A few weeks ago I decided it was time to tackle what a friend of mine used to call a Tiger Task. You know – those tasks you’d rather do after cleaning the bathroom with a toothbrush and reroofing the house and getting a root canal. This one was to empty out the boxes of my seminary education. Yikes. Everything was three-hole punched and in a labelled notebooks. All my notes, resources, articles, quizzes in the notorious Blue Books, final papers, the works. They stretched from about 2001 to graduation in 2005. At St. Andrew’s I had them attractively displayed across the top of all the bookcases. Can you guess how many times I actually reached for the one with historical charts of the Episcopal Church? Ha. Not so much...

So when I retired they got put in boxes and eventually Doug very “helpfully” migrated them into the house. These things are not easy to do, right? It took me 20 years to move all my physical therapy books and professional history along, so this isn’t that bad! But you know what happens; it takes hours and hours because you look at everything and it is closing the door on a part of your life. I got rid of it all except for one small binder in which I put my final papers. I will look those back over; they seem pretty impressive now from this distance!

One of the random things which surfaced came from a class on Ecclesiology (study of the Church) from Seattle U. It’s an article called “False or limited images of Church.” There are six models described: Noah’s Ark, The Garden Club, McDonald’s, Therapy Group, Army or International Corporation, or a Secret Fraternity or Sorority.

All the descriptions are entertaining, interesting and sadly on-point but I’ll just share two to give you an idea. I know you can relate to these based on your own church experiences over the years. The **Garden Club** is a very American way of viewing the Church. It is just one of many organizations one belongs to like the theatre or Rotary, except there are more meetings. It’s just one more voluntary association putting demands on one’s time. It is viewed as being more concerned with finances and worship schedules than witnessing to the Kingdom of God. If the demands of the Church become too burdensome members will simply drop out in some way or another and put their energy into gardening.

My favorite is **McDonald’s**, which the Jesuit professor described as a very traditional Catholic view of the Church. The Church should be something you can count on to be the same always and everywhere. Whether you are in Seattle or Seoul or Santiago you should be able to enter a church and find basically the same thing. Like McDonald’s, in this model there is not a great variety of food and it is generally pretty bland, but the restrooms are always clean, the menu doesn’t change, and the prices are reasonable. And while the food is not fantastic, it will fill you up. The service is also fast, so you can get in and out quickly.

There is a saying: “They came seeking God and we gave them the Church.”

Of course, none of these are St. Barnabas. But we can see flashes of truth in all our churches, especially if we look with eyes from the outside. In large part, this is not the Church the disciples were given at Pentecost. They wouldn't recognize what has developed from when they were in the Upper Room and those flames of Pentecostal fire danced and rested on their heads. The primary New Testament image of Community, what we now call the Church, is as the **Body of Christ**. It is in plain sight as the disciples gathered; not as individuals, but as a community, a collective, with each member equally vital and radically interdependent for the wholeness of the Body.

This has been a pretty wild ride for the disciples. They have spent the last three years trying to figure out who Jesus is with no Google to help them. The disciples gave Jesus some lip service but in the end they all stayed away, abandoned and betrayed him at the time of his crucifixion. But even so, he didn't leave them alone. He's been back, showing up inside locked doors, cooking fish on the beach, walking the roads with them. And just ten days ago in church time, he left their sight again, promising a new Advocate or Comforter who will be with them always.

So here they are, together again, not as individuals checking him out on their laptops or hoping for a **Noah's Ark** version of community so they could escape the world and ride out the storm of the religious authorities, but as a community trying to figure out this whole thing about a Holy Spirit coming to be with them.

In a sermon on Pentecost, Barbara Brown Taylor begins by saying there is "no better proof that Jesus is who he said he was than the before and after pictures of the disciples. Before Pentecost they were dense timid bumbler who fled at the least sign of trouble. Afterwards, they were fearless leaders. They healed the sick and cast out demons. They went to jail gladly, where they sang hymns until the walls fell down." "The Twelve go from a defeated, sorry lot to those who tilted the world on its axis." [Jason Byassee] They were propelled into the world as apostles and nothing was ever the same.

We might call it a multi-media event now only poorly imitated by Hollywood. Wind, flames, speaking in all kinds of languages so that the visitors to Jerusalem for the feast of Shavuot could understand the apostles' proclamation of who Jesus is. God has a history of special effects; bushes on fire which don't burn up, manna falling from heaven, whirlwinds which carry prophets away. Today it would "go viral" in social media, faster than jumping baby goat videos.

Do we believe such astonishing displays of God through the Holy Spirit still happen? Was Pentecost an exciting day 2000 years ago that we now celebrate with red balloons and red clothes? Studies have shown that churches which are the most vibrant and passionate about their ministry EXPECT the Holy Spirit to show up and lead the way. In Marshall Jolly's opinion if we sit and wait for the Holy Spirit to send fire and wind and all we've come to associate with the first Pentecost, we are going to be disappointed. We'd be members of the McDonald's church, just expecting the same old thing millennia after millennia, maybe checking out the **Therapy Group** down the street to see if they could help us feel better about our problems.

But if we allow ourselves to imagine what a fresh outpouring of the Holy Spirit might look like, we may be surprised. If we expect God to continue to create and renew life and allow ourselves to imagine something new, something holy, something surprising or astonishing, then anything is

possible. Pentecost is an invitation to dream and to see that what we thought was outlandish actually lies within our reach. As the Franciscan blessing says, “to do what others say cannot be done.”

Pentecost means that a new wind of mission work is let loose upon the earth. It is the dramatic fire of transformation and courage and daring to do things we didn't dream were possible. We can feed everyone. We can shelter everyone. We can have safe schools and communities. We can heal the earth. We can create peace in the Holy Land and Ukraine. As communion begins, we will sing, come Holy Spirit, Veni Sancte Spiritus, pour your blessing upon us. Give us the courage and strength to do the work you have placed before us.

The Holy Spirit has been present since the beginning, when she moved across the waters on the first day of Creation and descended onto Jesus and each of us at our baptisms and each time we renew those promises. The breath of God is the air of creation. We are enlivened by all the air there ever was. It's left over from the beginning of everything and includes star dust and volcanic ash. It's the same air dinosaurs and Adam and Jesus and Michelangelo and Lizzie Borden and banana slugs breathe. [BBT] Every inspiration and expiration recirculates the possibility of life to another. Wind and breath are powerful symbols of divine presence. They signify the in-breaking of heaven into human affairs.

The disciples were converted from fear and inaction to passion and ministry; to the work that God has always been doing: to love as God loves, to gather and unite, to forgive and raise up, to bind wounds and restore sight, to reconcile what is lost. [Bradley Schmeling] Pentecost is a global church launch; the inauguration of a community, a movement of spirit-filled people who are now the Body of Christ. Rick Morley says that the Church wasn't given a mandate to stay-put, set up shop, and get comfy as a **Secret Fraternity or Sorority**. The Church was given maps and itineraries and shofars and sent on its way.

Several years ago the Rev. Canon Janet Campbell wrote that everything we do within the Holy Eucharist – the welcome, the Word, the Peace, the meal at the Table – is all for the final sending: the Dismissal. As our deacons know best, we come together to be dispersed. The liturgy ends in a new beginning as the living body of the risen Christ goes out into the world. The Holy Spirit intends to send us out into the week ahead strengthened and challenged by our Sunday gathering for worship, by the apostles' teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread and the prayers as living members of the Body of Christ.

Jesus is no longer bound by place and time. Through the gift of the Holy Spirit, in all languages and means of expression, Jesus is in our midst and kept alive in new ways. No quarter-pounders here. Expect to see the wind and feel the heat of the fire. Come, Holy Spirit.

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