

The Feast of Pentecost – May 17, 2026

Acts 2:1-21

Wind, Fire, Water

A sermon preached by The Rev. Dianne Andrews at St. Barnabas Episcopal Church, Bainbridge Island, WA.



As we ponder the gift of the Holy Spirit that fell upon the early disciples so many years ago, I invite us to sit for a moment and think back upon recent... or distant memories of being church... memories in which you recognized... and felt... the power of God’s presence. Was it at the altar rail? Was it when passing the peace? Was it when sharing fellowship, or when working side-by-side with others? Was it in a discussion, or class, or a time of play? When I think of this place, I envision the many souls who have gathered here over the years for Sunday worship or to mark major life events. I recognize the well-worn path between the baptismal font and the communion table. I think of couples who, in the presence of family and friends, stood before the altar to exchange vows of marriage... I think of people of all ages who have gathered at the font to receive the sacrament of new life through the waters of baptism. I think of the many farewells that taken place when burial offices were said, and loved ones have been commended to God. Christ’s people have gathered and continue to gather in this place and in churches around the globe to share God’s peace that passes all understanding. Together, the people of St. Barnabas have gathered together in the spirit of joy and celebration...as well in tender moments of love and loss. Church is a place where we remember that we belong to God and to one another as a community that supports one another through the peaks and valleys of our earthly sojourn... and to be nourished for service in the world. Thinking back on your experience of church in this, or in any other church community, does one memory in particular stand out for you? Can you feel it? Hold and savor that memory as a touchstone of your faith journey, and then continue to gather cherished moments as your journey continues. Sharing such stories can only strengthen the bonds of community that we share.

I have a precious memory of church that I would like to share. A couple decades ago, I was serving as Associate to the Rector at St. John’s in Lancaster, Pennsylvania. The church is a big, gothic, inner-city church with high ceilings, marble parquet floors, and an altar situated way upfront, beyond the choir stalls. At the time, my son Cameron was a toddler. On Sunday mornings, little ones would be in the nursery during the first part of the service. When communion was being served, the tots would be brought into the church to join their families. One Sunday, as communion was ending, as it seemed that the little ones were not going to make it into church for communion, I began clearing up at the altar. But just as the last linen was folded, I looked up and saw a little curly haired silhouette in the arched doorway at the far end of the nave. I knew that it was Cam. When he saw me, his little legs sprang into motion. With arms outstretched, Cam began his long journey up the aisle towards the altar crying “Mamma, Mamma, Mamma!” while his tiny sneakers lit up and flashed with every gleeful step. In unison, the congregation sighed a big “Awwwww...” When Cam tripped and fell at the chancel steps, the congregation sighed a big “Oooohhh!” Cam then jumped up from his fall, ran through the choir area, ducked under the brass altar rail and raised his tiny hands up to me in position to receive Jesus bread. For me, this memory encapsulates the fullness

of knowing what it means to belong to Christ and to one another. Cameron knew that he was cherished in the St. John's community. True delight was shared in the sanctuary that day.

Today, we remember the moment of Pentecost as we celebrate the gift of "church" that is far more than the habit of merely going to church. The gift of the Holy Spirit inspires and calls us to "BE church"... to be honest, and real... to be a people of hospitality and hope, to be co-creators in building-up the reign of God which is the vision and promise of our faith. We cannot be church by ourselves. The gift of the Holy Spirit has blessed us as a people bestowing gifts of new understanding and new relationship. The Spirit has empowered us to be witnesses of God's call to life in the world, calling forth the vast wealth and diversity of gifts we have been given as God's people. So here we are today, gathered as a people of Christ to celebrate the many gifts of Pentecost. We gather to renew the promises we have made in baptism... we gather as Christians have done from the earliest days... and to do, once again, what Christ has instructed us to do... to break bread and drink wine in his name... and then to go forth to feed and care for others... that from our broken and mended hearts... rivers of living water may flow...

We gather to remember... that AT ALL TIMES... Christ is the source and center of our lives. As Martin Marty put it: "Not God on the margins, not God as an option; not God on the weekends. Got at center and circumference."¹ Church is about the whole human experience, from cradle to grave and beyond.

Here is another story of church that isn't mine, but that was shared with me by a colleague during our recent clergy conference. One Sunday at the altar rail, the vicar offered six-year-old Theo his first communion wafer. On that Sunday, and for months to come, Theo not only took the wafer, but he broke it in half and shared his Jesus meal back with the vicar. In receiving, Theo felt moved to share the goodness he had received. Theo knew that he was cherished and supported in a community that together was nourished around Christ's table. That is what church is about...

I would like to close with a piece by the author and poet Malcolm Guite entitled, "Our Mother Tongue is Love; A Sonnet for Pentecost":

Today we feel the wind beneath our wings
 Today the hidden fountain flows and plays
 Today the church draws breath at last and sings
 As every flame becomes a Tongue of praise.
 This is the feast of fire, air, and water
 Poured out and breathed and kindled into earth.
 The earth herself awakens to her maker
 And is translated out of death to birth.
 The right words come today in their right order
 And every word spells freedom and release
 Today the gospel crosses every border
 All tongues are loosened by the Prince of Peace
 Today the lost are found in His translation.
 Whose mother-tongue is Love, in every nation.

¹ Peter W. Marty, "Christian Century", June 8, 2016, pg. 3.

Now...may the gift of the Spirit fill every last corner of our being... bodies, mind, hearts and souls.

May the gift of the Spirit continue to fill this place and spill out beyond these walls and into a world that is so very hungry for new life.

May the gift of the Spirit strengthen and guide us this day and always...

Amen...