

I want to share the story of the atheist, K.

He didn't believe that there was God. Of course, he wasn't interested in going to church. There was only one church in this area. Unfortunately, this church was well known as a social club where people have no conversions or decisions for Christ and not interested in serving and welcoming people.

One day the church building literally caught on fire, and everyone, the whole town ran toward to help extinguish the flames including K, the atheist! Someone noticed the village atheist and hollered out.

So, his neighbor said, "Hey, this is something. This is the first time we've ever seen you running to church!" The atheist replied, "This is the first time I've ever seen the church on fire!" I'm sure if our church were on fire, we'd also get much quick attention. However, if our church were on fire spiritually, if we were filled with the Holy Spirit, we'd be catching attention like early Christians. Today, with this story, we reflect our faith journey with filled Holy Spirit, again.

We had the baptism of Emerson the last Sunday. When I introduced the service of Baptism, I said, "We are incorporated into God's mighty acts of salvation and given new birth through water and the Spirit. All this is God's gift, offered to us without price."

When we believe in Jesus Christ and are baptized as the children of God, God gives us the gift of a new life through water and the Holy Spirit

Paul says in Romans 8:14, "For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. Do you live your life by God's Spirit? Are you filled with the Holy Spirit?"

Today is Pentecost Sunday. On the church lectionary Calendar, it represents an ending as well as a beginning. Pentecost means "the 50th day" in Greek. It is the end of the "Great Fifty Days" of the Easter Season. Also, it is the beginning of the early church. During 40 days' lent season, we have experienced God's love and grace through walking together with Jesus' suffering. Then, we entered the Easter Season, which celebrates Jesus' resurrection for 50 days.

Isn't it interesting that church lectionary uses a longer time for celebrating Jesus' resurrection than for reflecting on Jesus' suffering?

It means our Christian life does not only embrace our sinfulness and our messes but also encourage us to celebrate our hope for resurrection. We pray for each other's suffering. We also celebrate together our joy and our hope as long as we can! After the Great Fifty Days, on the day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit was poured out on 120 followers of Christ. It becomes the beginning of the Early church ministry to make disciples of all nations.

Today is the birthday of the church, beginning our ministry as God's disciple in this loving church. How can we celebrate the birthday of the church?

When I check the definition of "celebrate," it means to do something special or enjoyable for an important event, occasion, or Holiday. I wonder what the early church members did with the celebration of Pentecost.

In Act 2, when the Holy Spirit came to people who gathered in the upper room, and then they began to speak in other languages, other people thought that Peter and disciples were filled with wine. They sure looked drunk. They sounded drunk. They acted drunk. However, Peter said, "We are not drunk. It is only nine o'clock in the morning."

They were not drunk, but they were intoxicated. They were sober, but they seemed to look drunk with new wine. What does this mean for us as Christians? That is the gift and paradox of this day, the celebration of Pentecost.

So, I want to ask you a question but don't answer it just yet. The question you first hear probably isn't the one I am asking. What are you drunk this morning? What does intoxicate your life?

Once upon a time, I was drunk on busyness and exhaustion, intoxicated with self-importance and the need to prove myself. Once upon a time, I was drunk on fear, intoxicated by controlling others and ourselves.

Once upon a time, I was drunk on toys, intoxicated by a bigger boat, twin engines, and the open Gulf waters.

Once upon a time, I was drunk on perfectionism, intoxicated with being right, doing right, and having my life put together in a neatly organized and beautifully wrapped package.

Once upon a time, I was drunk on the need for approval, intoxicated by what others thought and said about me.

Once upon a time, I was drunk on knowledge, intoxicated with figuring it all out and getting the right answer.

Once upon a time, I was drunk on... Well, by now you've probably figured out where this is headed.

You get my point. So let me ask you again, what are you drunk on this morning? What intoxicates your life?

What is your drink of choice?

There are so many things that poison and distorts our thoughts and our feelings. It causes us to stumble and fall. It makes us forget how God creates us with the holiness and beauty of who we really are and who we are to become.

That is not God's desire for us. So, now let's change our drink of choice. Let's drink new wine. A new wine which God is given for you! This gift is completely unexpected and even unimaginable. You are dizzy with love, joy, and gratitude and at the same time clearheaded about the meaning of this gift by God.

This is a new wine for celebrating Pentecost with the wind of God's generosity for us. It is the power of God to change and transform us.

At Pentecost, a new spirit, the Holy Spirit of God, fills and intoxicates us. We are intoxicated by God's love, God's mercy, God's grace, God's generosity, God's beauty, God's deeds of power in our lives.

So tell me about your own life. Where is Pentecost happening for you?

It might be a little different from the experiences of the early church members. It may not have the drama of a rushing wind, tongues of fire, or foreign languages, but it is filled with the power of God to changes lives. The moment of Pentecost that you open your eyes to the mystery of God.

I see Pentecost happens in our church, our congregation's deep desire for creating a welcoming community. You welcome each other, make God's disciples and nurture discipleships, support each other during difficult times, and have a deep desire for learning more about God and following Jesus Christ.

That's why we celebrate this Feast of Pentecost. The grace of Pentecost transcends time, space, and the circumstances of our lives. The Spirit of God is continually being poured into our lives, bringing us to the new wine of Christ's life. Pentecost is a gift and a grace to be lived.

So, here is new wine, let's celebrate it!

Please join me a prayer of Pentecost which is written by The Rev. MaryJane Pierce Norton.

Gracious God. We are reminded again when the first believers in Jesus were given the courage to tell others about Jesus. We believe you give us that same courage to say to others about Jesus through the power of the Holy Spirit. You know, O God, that sometimes we are fearful and we feel alone. However, just like that Pentecost long ago, we, too, are surrounded by your love and presence. Help us live in such a way that others see in us a reflection of your love. Help us have the courage to tell others about the difference it makes in our lives to trust in your love and care. Help us see those around who want to be in the fellowship of Christians. Help us to witness to one another so that we grow in faith. Through the power of your Holy Spirit and the witness of Jesus the Christ, we pray today. Amen.