

Acts 2:1-21
Pentecost Day C
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Come, Holy Spirit, Come

My granddaughter Scout regularly asks everyone, “What’s your favorite color?” Her dad’s is blue, and so is her Papa’s. Her Mom’s is green. Scout’s favorite is yellow, which she also says is the color of her hair.

“What’s your favorite color, Nana?” “Scoutie, my favorite color is red.”

And today I see a lot of red.

It’s good to be here, on this Day of Pentecost, the birth day of the Church!

And it’s a doubly important day for this church, for just as other church’s commemorate the saints their church’s have been named for, we too celebrate the gift of our church name. So for us here, at the ECOHS, how can we help but pay particular attention to a day when we remember that miraculous, uncontainable quality of the Holy Spirit, that enables God’s people to do what can only be done with God’s help — to do more than we can possibly imagine.

This second chapter of Acts begins with the disciples together inside a house. Since Jesus’ ascent into heaven, they have remained inside, waiting and praying. All that noisy, chaotic world is firmly out there and they have not yet ventured away from their inside reality.

But then, it happens. The Spirit comes. It’s unexpected, frightening, exhilarating, and beyond a human capability to really describe. It sounds like a violent wind, it appears as divided tongues of fire among them. The Spirit’s arrival fills the disciples to overflowing and catapults them out those closed doors into the world. After a period of prayerful waiting, they are now unable to control their vibrant excitement and their desire to proclaim. Their enthusiasm is so obvious, their joy so complete, that even strangers can’t ignore them, and attempt to explain away their crazily excessive behavior.

The Kingdom of God cannot be contained and what is both spoken and heard is miraculous. This miracle is a self-revelation of God. Jesus has empowered his disciples to break the barriers that prevent communion and community. By God willing both speaking and hearing, the Spirit has provided new possibilities of understanding for all of God’s beloved, new possibilities for a kind of church community that may not look or talk or think the same, but has been miraculously joined by one Lord, one faith, one baptism.

This is the beginning of the church. A church without walls, a community of faith that is willing to get out and meet people where they are, whose disciples proclaim the gospel in word and deed, unconcerned with what others may say or how strange it may look. It’s the start of a church whose trust is in Jesus, a church that is empowered by the Spirit and sent out, projected into the world to live into God’s love by radically loving their neighbors.

The crowd thought the disciples must be drunk. For that way of acting is not of this world.

This week ago, Pope Francis was in the news once more for winning the 2016 Charlemagne Prize for “his efforts to promote the European values of peace, tolerance, compassion and solidarity.” Pope Francis is the first leader from the “global South” and only the fourth non-European to be awarded this prize. And he’s in interesting company, considering the previous three non-European recipients were George C. Marshall, the author of the plan to save Europe

from starvation after World War II, Henry Kissinger the Secretary of State to former President Nixon, and former President Bill Clinton. Not an award you would typically see given to a Jesuit priest.

But maybe it's not so surprising. The Pope has been involved in so many international ecumenical events in the past year, events that also have political importance: his trip to Central Africa, his efforts towards reconciliation with the Orthodox church through a visit with Patriarch of Moscow, visiting the refugees on Lesbos island with the Patriarch of Constantinople. And later this year, the Pope will travel to Sweden for the 500th anniversary of the Protestant Reformation. His travels, his activities, while deeply spiritual, do also have political impact.

In his acceptance speech, the Pope spoke about a Europe that is becoming closed in on itself, a Europe which in some places is in the process of building fences. He reminded the European leaders of the link between solidarity and peace, urging them to start building towards the future by having open discussions, challenging them to find ways to engage all of the players on the global stage, and creating a new Europe that is sympathetic and open to youth, migrants, and refugees. It's a difficult message for European leaders, who face an immense humanitarian refugee crisis, while also experiencing a frightening resurgence of nationalism. But Pope Francis is not concerned with politics, but carrying the Gospel message — by speaking of “a new European humanism,” he's talking about a church that plays its role in the religious community, but also promotes dialogue among Christians and people of different faiths.

We too face challenging times in our own country, in our cities, and our neighborhoods. We have our own American brand of rhetoric about building walls, about turning away from refugees and immigrants. We too experience divisions and fears because of religion, race, refugees and immigration. We too are told that we can be safe and secure if only we remain inside, closing our doors, and isolating ourselves from the other.

But that's not God's way. That is not the gospel. Instead we are asked to recall, to remember, Pentecost. That first Pentecost began in indoor seclusion and moved to public proclamation, to encountering people where they are and helping them both hear and see the good news of God in Christ.

The disciples, could not remain inside, could not share their thoughts and prayers only with each other, for our Lord and Savior had come for all people, bringing divine gifts of grace, mercy, inclusion, and welcome. Today, as Jesus' disciples, we too are called to welcome those with whom we disagree and reach beyond the things that divide us — we too need to discover that seeking unity in Christ, is not demanding uniformity, and that diversity does not have to mean division.

This Holy Spirit nudges us, pushes us towards the unfamiliar, stretches us toward new horizons. We don't not know where this in-breaking of heaven into human affairs will take us. Discipleship does entail taking risks — like living into the discomfort of stepping outside our comfort zones and daring to accept the possibility that we could encounter negativity and misunderstanding as we follow Christ instead of the ways of the world. But as we heard in John's gospel, “Do not let your hearts be troubled, do not let them be afraid.”

For together we can trust in God's wild Spirit — trust that we too can proclaim and act in ways that spread Christ's love, justice, and mercy towards all of God's children. We live into our name as a church of the Pentecost, when we move out into the world and share the grace of God we experience within this community with those outside these walls.

As many of you know, during Fr. Keith's Sabbatical, this church is actively engaged in a season of discernment and listening, to better understand where we, as a community, are called to grow

and stretch ourselves to serve our Lord. Our discernment time aligns with Fr. Keith's own period of listening, during his time of sabbatical renewal. We are in that time of waiting and praying.

Join in as we listen to the Holy Spirit through pilgrimage, through working with children and the marginalized, and through mission. We take this time to discern in the hope of the Holy Spirit enthusiastically catapulting us into new and vibrant ways to serve our Living God outside these walls.

Be Bold in Christ. As you come to this table to be nourished and strengthened by the gift of Christ's Body and Blood, dare to offer up this simple prayer...dare to be open to the possibilities of God's tumultuous intrusion into our daily lives.

As you come to the table today, dare to pray "Come, Holy Spirit, Come." Amen.