

BROADWAY CHRISTIAN CHURCH • COLUMBIA, MISSOURI
THE WORSHIP OF GOD • JUNE 9, 2019
PENTECOST

Litany

Based on Psalm 104

Bless the Lord, O my soul!

God is clothed in majesty, wrapped in light like a garment.

God stretches out the heavens like a tent, spreading beams of energy over the waters.

Let clouds become chariots and wind the wings of the Spirit!

The Scripture

Acts 2:1-8,12-18

When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.

Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each. Amazed and astonished, they asked, "Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language? All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, "What does this mean?" But others sneered and said, "They are filled with new wine."

But Peter, standing with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed them, "Men of Judea and all who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and listen to what I say. Indeed, these are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only nine o'clock in the morning. No, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel: 'In the last days it will be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams. Even upon my slaves, both men and women, in those days I will pour out my Spirit; and they shall prophesy.

The Message
Water and Fire
Nick Larson

The Holy Spirit is a mystery and shows up where and when it wants. God, at least, in my experience and understanding doesn't seem all that concerned with emerging when others think she should.

The Spirit, "*Ruah*" in Hebrew and "*Pneuma*" in Greek, speak of this portion of the trinity as invisible and like the wind, felt but not seen, experienced but not confirmed. The breath of God gives life in the ancient poems of creation. The Spirit is directed in specific ways and with purpose. It is when God comes to dwell in the hearts and lives of God's people.

This weekend at our baptismal retreat, I had the pleasure of walking our prayers stations with Cedric, and his insights and wisdom impressed me, and I could feel the Spirit move in him. Thank you for sharing that time with me, Cedric.

One of the stations that our candidates shared with us that was their favorite was the one where we wrote out our fears, worries and sins, and dropped them into the water. And in an instant, the paper touched the water it began to dissolve, leaving our words swirling in the basin.

It is a great joy of mine to watch the mentors and candidates think and pray together, to see them reflect on the mysteries of faith. I always find that walking the stations with a candidate reminds me of the new beginning that comes in faith. No matter where we are on our journey, we can be like the first disciples on Pentecost, unsure and awaiting something special to happen in our midst.

And in each moment, we are invited once again to begin anew. My favorite part of the retreat each year is sitting around the baptistry to pause and close in worship together. Bare toes dangling into the waters, I invite everyone to remember that feeling, to mark the moment as sacred and as holy, because in the midst of busy moments and celebrations of renewal and baptism, we often get overdone in the moment. We are asked to focus on too much at once, what song are we singing, where am I supposed to stand next, why is the sanctuary so different on this Sunday? Those aren't bad things, and yet, they fill our hearts and minds in a way that on Friday evening late at the retreat, we don't have them.

My hope for you this morning is that you remember your own feeling of baptism, or you anticipate what your baptism might be like. I remember my own feeling of baptism, the nerves entering the waters, the joy of coming out to friends and family ready to embrace me. I remember the cool crisp waters of the stream in which I was baptized.

It is so easy to go through a day without ever really waking up – to look without seeing, to listen without hearing, to live in the story we tell ourselves about the world rather than the world itself. It sounds obvious when I say it, but this is just because it's so common. We assume an over familiarity with the world around us, and that maybe makes it easier to live from day to day but harder to see things as they are.

There is nothing magical about these waters. However, there is something special about them.

And so, when we sit at the end of our retreat with our toes dipped into the warm clear waters of this tub, I invite each to feel the familiar feeling of being wet, and the special feeling that makes these waters feel a long way from just another shower, a dip in the pool, or soak in the tub.

Just as the early disciples on Pentecost could be overwhelmed in the moment by what Scripture describes at the tongues of fire, we, too, can get so focused on the miraculous that we miss the point completely. Acts 2 isn't about the instant use of so many languages or the tongues that these disciples were miraculously speaking. The birth of the Church is about the community gathered and that the message of love and forgiveness that comes freely through Jesus Christ is being shared.

These waters are just water, just a simple ordinary element of daily life. A sustaining force that we each need to live, and yet, these waters allow for a moment of "Wow" of wonder, and if you go deeply into the moment of wonder, you might for one moment look inward, and see the wonder of your true self, as a beloved child of God.

We must use the experiences like baptism, like Pentecost, to go within, to stop looking at the simple element upon which the experience happens. We need to look through the ordinary element of water, to see the renewal. The death and resurrection of Christ enacted the promise of a holy companion, the advocate and helper that can teach us all things.

So often, we get caught up on wanting our miracles on the outside that we don't stop to realize that we are constantly being offered wonder from within ourselves. The "special" happens all around us on a daily basis. When you look at a tree, do you stop to consider the amazing fact that it began as a little seed and has grown into this huge tree which has millions of leaves and twigs, each one different and unique?

We want our miracles on the outside.

You may find wonder in the sunrise or the stars in the sky at night. You may find it on a mountaintop, or in the unexpected kindness of a stranger. You may find it in a book; or a film; or in the ecstatic, overpowering moment at a concert when the band blows the roof off the building.

In each moment, in each instance, you become aware that the parts don't quite add up to the majesty of the whole.

So, what's the extra piece? Where does that come from?

Clearly, it comes from inside of us. It is that God-given spark within each of us. If you find wonder in all these disparate places, the common denominator in all of those experiences is you. Inside. Within.

A true believer and a committed skeptic can both gaze reverently at the night sky, or the towering redwood, or the screaming infant, or the waters of baptism, and find in that moment the humble, open sense of awe and interconnectedness with the universe and the Divine that exists at the heart of both the religious and the scientific traditions.

It isn't about assurance or understanding. It is about suspending those thoughts to experience the instant.

Both skeptic and believer are capable of getting lost in the weeds of our own certainty, and both are capable of rising above it to share unflinchingly at the brute fact of our own existence and to find in that awful and joyful reality, the experience of gratitude – despite everything – and wonder.

Years ago, I came across the idea that truly great works of art instruct less than they remind. That is what these waters and the tongues of fire at Pentecost are truly designed to do for each of us. To remind us that God's Spirit is among us, right here, right now. When you listen to Leonard Cohen's "Hallelujah," or walk through Frank Lloyd Wright's Unity Temple in Oak Park, Illinois, or watch old YouTube clips of Michael Jordan at the height of his stardom, the experience is not one of discovering something new but rediscovering something old within yourself.

You don't have to understand all of the mysteries of faith to enter into the waters of baptism. Certainly, I don't understand them all. None of the specific answers to the world's questions are available through baptism. Yet, it doesn't matter.

What the Spirit is bringing you today in its own particular combination of sound, fire, darkness, and water that transcends theology, concepts, or ideas. These waters are not to be explained because they are bigger and more fundamental.

I pray that your contact with these waters today will expand your understanding of the world, to allow your concepts to be stretched so completely that they may never return to its former shape.

Let your new perspective, God's perspective, force you to widen your scope. Let your new perspective be wide enough that it reduces the scope of your perspective you walked in with to essentially nothing, so that the experience God is offering you is far wider and far greater than anything you might have ever known before.

Amen?

Amen.