

The Feast of Pentecost
 May 31, 2010
 Numbers 11:24-30
 Psalm 104:25-37

All Saints' Church (virtual)
 Year A
 Acts 2:1-21
 John 20:19-23

May the words of my mouth and the meditation of our hearts
 be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, our Rock and Redeemer.

Pentecost is about Reversals.

What was once, is no longer. What was doomed has been redeemed. What was desolation has become restoration. What was dead has come alive.

Peter is preaching about visions and dreams and hopes. He is no longer sinking in water too deep for him to navigate. Peter has a new tongue, facing the tongues of the world.

He is no longer sealed away in a locked room, isolated and alone, frightened for his very life. He is no longer denying his Lord as the cock crows. Peter is preaching Christ crucified, Christ resurrected, Christ alive til' the end of time.

Peter is no longer held in by the guilt of his weaknesses, fears, and limitations. He is preaching about the grace of God's forgiveness and the power of God's love.

Peter is moved by the Holy Spirit. He is pulsating with life, twirling within the wind of God's presence; and, as the tongues of fire descend upon the tongues of the world, no one will ever be the same again. The incarnation of God's living spirit is no longer limited to Jesus.

This is the message, the gift of Pentecost, (pente) 50 days after Easter, the gift given to the assembled, the gift of our faith.

The miracle of tongues, easy to see, as all the languages of the world become comprehensible under God's delight. Imagine that kind of Unity shaped by God's vision. Imagine the world understanding each other.

How could this be? The world understanding each other?

We are also witnessing the miracle of ears. The tongues of fire are landing on the ears of understanding. New tongues and new ears. WhitSunday, as this day is also called, refers not only to the white gowns that are worn by the soon to be baptized, but also to Wit- to insight . Will we understand? Will we comprehend? Will we listen? Will we look and listen for the fire of God's vision and speak with new tongues? Will we see in new ways?

Aren't these the pressing questions of today? Not just for the church, but for the whole world.

Let's return to the beginning of the story, to those locked doors of that room where the disciples were huddled away because of their fear.

I identify with that locked up room. I'm there..... and I think many of you are there with me. I feel locked up in all the ways I am careful... with my masks, my cleaning supplies, my protection, and my distance. I feel locked up by anxiety, fear, anger, deep sadness, confusion, and lack of faith. I feel locked up by the magnitude of 100,000 deaths.

I don't only "feel" locked up. I am locked up. And so are you.

We are locked up in a crazy world. How odd to wait two weeks before I can see my daughter who is isolation. How absurd to be waving from lawns, parking lots, or my car to people I care about. How weird is it to only see most of you through these Zoom squares on my computer screen. How strange is it for Sandi to have to wait for the results of a test before she can go hug her mother. How bizarre it is for many of you not to hug your grandchildren, or to dine only with your spouse, or to eat alone, or to not leave the grounds of your residence or to be home-schooling and working from home.

And let's face it. Don't you feel locked up when you see pictures from your tv screen of people swimming in public places, or crowded on a beach, or partying in a bar. What are these people thinking? How can they be so dense? In so much denial, selfishness, cluelessness, ignorance? I must admit, I am often lacking in my Christian response. Especially when I think of the sacrifice of not opening up our churches in order to protect each other, to save lives, to love each other.

Locked up and so what do we do? What did the disciples do? They waited, they listened, and they prayed.

They had no idea what was going to happen. As far as they knew their world had gone to hell in a handbasket, ending; the principalities and powers to be, had won; their Savior snatched away from them by the cruel jaws of life; and everything they had hoped for, dashed. They were hiding in their own fear, grief, anger, disappointment..... locked up in the upper room.

They had no idea of Church, the Holy Spirit, or the Body of Christ. They were locked up just like us. Yet we have something, that they didn't have.

We have the wit, WhitSunday, Pentecost, the wit, the knowledge, the insight, the beauty, the power of Church, the Holy Spirit and the Body of Christ. The Trinity of the Church, the Holy Spirit and the Body of Christ is with us in our locked room, descending upon us every day. We need to listen for this Trinity, look for it, find it, trust it, pray for it.

The tongues of fire, in so many dialects, tones, accents, words, are speaking one language. And that's the language of love. And the ears of understanding hear the one message: our purpose in life is to care for each other, to care for the earth and to care for future unborn lives. Christ crucified, died and buried to do what? To come alive to show us that there is one way, and that is to love, to watch out for each other's backs, to protect, to empathize, to sacrifice, to be bonded together, to trust, to create community, to hope together.

Surprisingly, we can do all of that in our locked down rooms... by waiting, listening, and praying.

Padraig O' Tuama, an Irish poet and spiritual teacher tells a story of being in church one day, and just at the priest lifted up the Eucharist and the Sanctus bells were ringing, a small child in one of the pews, yelled out, and not with his inside voice,

“Hellooooooooooooo Jesus.” The parishioners were surprised, shocked, taken aback, and his mother embarrassed, but also a little bit proud, and the boy, sensing his moment, yelled again,

“Hellooooooooooooo Jesus.” Padraig continues by saying, “He greeted Jesus loudly, warmly, with a welcome as wide and magnificent as the world. It can be a shock to take Jesus of Nazareth seriously.”

Isn't that the truth? It can be a shock to take Jesus of Nazareth seriously. And yet, that's what we can do in our locked rooms...Because guess what... guess who's locked up with us?

Jesus. And yet, we know there's no keeping Jesus down. No keeping Jesus locked up.

When you see the beauty of a flower or hear the song of a bird or make a mask, or pack a bag for the food pantry, or listen to your favorite opera, or read a poem, or send a check to help those in need, or wait for a test to make sure you're safe, or wear a mask for others' safety, or forgive those who seem reckless, or give over your worries to God, or plant a garden, or take a walk in the woods, or help your children to read, or teach your grandmother of how to use a computer so she can “go to church.” In all these things, these small things, life is teeming over.

These small acts are not small. They are the very essence of life, of a life that matters... that is living by the one universal tongue, the one universal language, the fire of love.

The Spirit is working, in this crazy world, and we have a prophetic role in it. Just like Jesus, with the Spirit of Jesus by our side, we too can pass through walls that seem to be keeping us in. With the Spirit of Jesus by our side, locked doors can't keep us in. We too, through the power of waiting, listening and praying, in our small but mighty acts, we too will appear to the world with Peace on our lips.

Speaking this peace that surpasses all understanding and acting in sacrificial love is the only way out of our locked doors. In this breaking down of all that we assumed was normal, with Jesus by our side, we can help the world to break open, tearing down our walls that kept us from loving each other. It's the only way out.

You are doing your part as you channel that little boy in the pew who didn't use his inside voice, when he said, “Hellooooooooooooo Jesus.” Every small act of love is your way of saying “Hellooooooooooooo Jesus.” Know that it matters. And remember how it all began... with a small band of folks, locked in a room, who didn't know their way out.... And the Spirit came. The Spirit was with you, now with you, with all of us.

This is the gift of faith. This is the gift of hope. This is the gift of Pentecost. And with it, there are no locked rooms! AMEN.