

This weekend we celebrate the Feast of Pentecost, and within the context of this recognition of the gift of God's Holy Spirit, we will also baptize Olivia-Jean Rose Broskowitz. We will also honor those who have completed the Eucharist Instruction class: Kathryn, Cameron, Annabelle, and Adam. In denominations where the Bishop does not need to be present for Confirmation, today is also a day when Confirmation is celebrated, as it is in several other congregations around town today. It's a great day in the life of the Church, and besides all of that, we get to wear red.

The main Pentecost story, and the liturgical timing for this day, comes to us from Luke, in the sequel to his gospel that we know as "The Acts of the Apostles." Fifty days after Easter morning, and ten days after the Ascension, the Holy Spirit comes like a mighty wind, with tongues of fire—essentially reversing the Tower of Babel story. In that old Genesis story, the narrator offers an explanation for why there are so many different languages in the world. When people speak different tongues, communication is much more difficult, which makes community more difficult. But on that Pentecost day in Jerusalem, on the fiftieth day after Easter morning, the Holy Spirit comes to make communication possible again, as each hears the gospel in her own native tongue.

There are many good sermons to be preached on that reading from Acts 2 about wind, and fire, and speech and about community and new beginnings. But today I am going to let it stand as it is and tell you a different Pentecost story. This one is rooted in the fourth gospel, and these strange verses that we heard from the seventh chapter of John just a few moments ago. I suspect it is a far less familiar story than Luke's to most of us, especially within the context of celebrating Pentecost. But I think it's no less important, and ultimately it reveals something just as important about God's Holy Spirit and the meaning of this day.

John's story is told in the future tense: it's about the Holy Spirit that Jesus promises he *will* send after he has been glorified, after finishing the work he came to do. So if we are putting this into a timeline, we are going back to the public ministry of Jesus, before his crucifixion. Jesus is in Jerusalem for the Festival of Booths—in Hebrew, the Feast of *Sukkoth*. Originally *Sukkoth* was a harvest festival, like Thanksgiving. But it also became a time for Jews to remember the central narrative in their life together: the Exodus, and particularly their forty-year sojourn through the Sinai Desert. There they had begun to learn how to put their whole trust in God's grace, one day at a time. There they had begun to learn that God would be faithful to the Covenant even when they were not. Our Jewish neighbors celebrate this festival to this day, often building their dwellings in the back yard of their homes where they eat their meals and sometimes even camp out. Building these "tabernacles" serves as a reminder of what it was like to be a people "on the move"—a people who lived in tents.

For John there is a word-play here as well. In the opening chapter of John's gospel you may recall that John puts all his cards on the table when he speaks of the Incarnate Logos: the Word that has become flesh to dwell among us. Literally, that word for *dwelt* among us is "pitched tent" among us. *That verb form is the same as the word tabernacle in today's reading—these "booths."* So if

you are reading the fourth gospel in Greek, you can't miss it: the *Word-tabernacled-among-us* is about to do something important at the festival of tabernacles, on the last day of this great festival.

One of the liturgical practices that occurred on that last day was a kind of parade. As I imagine it in my mind's eye it would be something like what we do on Palm Sunday: the priest would lead a procession of the whole congregation to the Pool of Siloam and draw water into a golden vessel. People would be singing and scripture would be read, perhaps words such as those we sang today from the prophet Isaiah:

With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation. And you will say in that day: Give thanks to the Lord, call on his name; make known his deeds among the nations; proclaim that his name is exalted. (Is. 12:3)

And then the water would be carried to the temple and poured into silver bowls around the altar. To people remembering their time in the desert, water is a very powerful metaphor. And even to people who have never spent time in the desert, we all know that water means life. An absence of rain at this time of year and there are no tomatoes and cucumbers in August. The right combination of both water and light is crucial: and *Sukkoth* is all about both water and light. It is written in the Mishnah (the oral traditions of the Torah) that “whoever has not seen the joy of drawing water has not experienced joy in his life.” This festival was about that joy, and about God's abundant blessings.

*So on the last day of the festival, the great day, while Jesus was standing there, he cried out, "Let anyone who is thirsty come to me, and let the one who believes in me drink. This metaphor is a familiar one to us who have been pondering John's Gospel this winter and spring. We may recall the Samaritan woman at the well, for example: Jesus told her that he is the living water, and those who drink the water that he offers will never thirst again. What comes next is important, though, and the punctuation is tricky in Greek. In fact, scholars have been arguing about it since the second century. It's ambiguous in Greek: is Jesus saying that *he* is the river of life? This would ring true and fit in nicely with that conversation he had with the Samaritan woman at the well. But he may be saying something much more radical than that, and in fact there is a very strong case to be made for the more radical reading, which is why that is the one chosen by the translators of the NRSV—the version of the Bible that we heard today: *out of the believer's heart shall flow rivers of living water.* Not just out of Jesus' heart, but out of the disciples' hearts—out of your heart and mine—shall flow rivers of living water.*

You and I are called to become rivers of life and to allow these living waters from God to flow through us and into our homes, our faith community and the world around us. Wow! I suspect that is a very scary idea for most of us. But I think it is precisely what John's Gospel does mean to say, not just in this obscure little text, but from those very first words about the Word that has *tabernacled* with us until the hour when “it is finished” on the Cross and He is Glorified, until he sends the Holy Spirit. If the Father truly is in the Son, and the Son is truly in the Father, and if we

really are in Christ, then we participate in the Divine life. That, Jesus says, is what the Holy Spirit is sent to do—to facilitate that process so that the waters of life might flow through us.

Isn't that scary? But of course even though John tells the story differently, it's what Luke is getting at as well and it's what this Feast of Pentecost is all about. Amazing things begin to happen when the Holy Spirit shows up. People like Peter, who was a bit of a screw-up before, are now equipped to do "infinitely more than he could ask or imagine." Persecutors of the Church, like Saul, are transformed into committed disciples. Ethiopian eunuchs and Roman soldiers start finding their way into a community where women and men have an amazing story to share. *Out of the believer's heart shall flow rivers of living water.* Out of the hearts of people like Olivia, and Kathryn, Cameron, Annabelle, and Adam and their siblings and parents and grandparents...

Now I know we don't feel like that every day. Sometimes we feel parched and tired and weary. Sometimes we lose hope. Sometimes we feel like sinners who are unworthy so much as to gather up the crumbs under God's table. But the Spirit comes anew to blow through us, bubbling up inside of us to heal and to renew and to strengthen and to comfort and to prod and to transform us. The Spirit comes like wind and like fire—and yes, like rivers of living water to lead us into all truth and health and joy and peace.

Marianne Williamson has written these words, sometimes incorrectly attributed to Nelson Mandela. Some of you may remember them from the film, *Coach Carter*. I think they have everything to do with these words from the seventh chapter of John's Gospel, and with the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate.
 Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure.
 It is our light, not our darkness that most frightens us.
 We ask ourselves: who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, fabulous?
 Actually, who are you not to be? You are a child of God.
 Your playing small does not serve the world.
 There is nothing enlightened about shrinking so that other people won't feel insecure around you.
 We are all meant to shine, as children do. We were born to make manifest the glory of God that is within us.
 It's not just in some of us; it's in everyone.
 And as we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same.
 As we are liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others.

With God's help, all things are possible. With God's help, we can let our light shine for the world to see. With God's help, we can speak words of good news and people will hear them in their own native tongues. With God's help, we can allow the breath of God to flow through us to others. With God's help, we can allow rivers of living water to flow through us, as we learn anew what it means to be the Church that exists for the sake of the world, empowered by the Holy Spirit to do great things.