

Emmanuel, Pentecost 2021

This valley of dry bones, bones so dry they aren't even connected to each other, that describes me this past year. Not only my soul, but my entire being is desperately dry. The parts of my body haven't wanted to work together. Any teamwork they developed just evaporated. Here's an example of a typical conversation. My brain says okay, let's take the laundry downstairs and get going. Pause, another pause. No conversation. Brain says, um, laundry, cause we're getting desperate here. My left and right hands say. What do we care, we do a great job holding a book, and we know Susan wants to read. Brain: but that's all you ever want to do. Stomach chimes in: ice cream, ice cream, ice cream. Then everyone votes and the laundry doesn't get done, I eat ice cream and then read the rest of the night. No motivation to accomplish things.

This valley of dry bones, it also describes us as a community. We have not been able to see and touch our church family. We have not been able to pass the peace, sing together, or break bread together. And today, this service is a time to start joining one another, worship together, being filled with the Holy Spirit. Renewing our baptismal covenant. And more importantly, just see each other. Many of us with stupid grins on our face, or a few tears coming down our cheeks. As Ezekiel said, "O my people, I will put my spirit within you, and you shall live." And that is why, seeing each of you this Pentecost is such a gift. Because today the Holy Spirit is with us, our hearts are lifted, and we will break bread together. Our church family is bound together by the spirit of love, caring about each other. We might also notice which masks are the best.

During the opening hymn the Starcher family was kind enough to carry our long-forgotten doves. Years ago, I believe Dave Rapp and Forrest Fletcher would carry them, dancing them over the congregation. A small memory of Dave, as tomorrow, he will be laid to rest at Quantico National Cemetery.

Eventually, when we can gather closer, we will be talking over one another, making a joyful sound. The sound of laughter, love and joy. And there may be so many people talking, that it will sound like foreign languages, because we are in such a hurry to catch up on a year's worth of news.

Gathering on Pentecost. Celebrating the arrival of the Holy Spirit. It's interesting that it is a multi-sensory event. "a sound like the rush of a violent wind", and "divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them." Let's be honest, sometimes Jesus' parables weren't the easiest things to understand. So, with the wind and tongues of fire, everyone will remember Pentecost, and the literal arrival of the Holy Spirit.

From the Acts of the Apostles we heard "In the last days, 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." I will be blunt and bold, our services do not generally have anyone talking about their visions, nor prophesying. It made me start thinking about Pentecostal churches. Here we are, celebrating Pentecost and the arrival of the Holy Spirit, yet we don't think of tongues of fire, a rush of wind or understanding those speaking in other languages, as a year-round or typical activity. The shape of our bishop's mitre. (a pointy hat) is supposed to represent the tongues of fire that rested on the heads of the disciples, when God sent the Holy Spirit to us.

Upon reflection, I think how I put the Pentecostal faith in a box, and stereo type their members. Disclosure: The following information is solely mine, and should not reflect on Emmanuel or the Episcopal Church. And maybe, I'm the only one who has ever stereo-typed the Pentecostal faith. What I found, is like any church, each subdivision or denomination had different beliefs. I was astonished to find that 35,000 people join the Pentecostal church each day. Of the world's two billion Christians a quarter are now Pentecostal—up from 6 percent in 1980. Last year's edition of the World Christian Encyclopedia says there are 644 million Pentecostals and Charismatics worldwide. It encompasses the members of Pentecostalism's 19,300 denominations and fellowships. . To put that in perspective, the Episcopal Church had about 1.8 million members in 2019. And the Anglican Communion has

85 million members. 85 million Anglicans, 644 million Pentecostals and Charismatics.

As with any religious groups, their beliefs are varied. From an article titled "10 Things Christians should know about the Pentecostal Church" by Amanda Casanova, "If a group or organization truly believes and obeys the Bible and does not modify, redact, or reward it's teaching; then that group is Christian." "Pentecostals believe that this Holy Spirit is real, powerful, and still works in miraculous ways even today. Common actions or miracles associated with the Spirit include: speaking in tongues, the gift of prophecy, the miraculous healings of the afflicted, and many other means." I was surprised that "1906 marked the birth of modern Pentecostalism" So in 115 years, they have grown to 644 million members. Two of their beliefs are "that baptism in the Holy Spirit begins when the person begins speaking in tongues." Like some Episcopalians, they believe in the practice of foot washing. Believing in the literal interpretation of the Bible, here is Mark 16, verses 17 and 18. ¹⁷ And these signs will accompany those who believe: by using my name they will cast out demons; they will speak in new tongues; ¹⁸ they will pick up snakes in their hands,^[a] and if they drink any deadly thing, it will not hurt them; they will lay their hands on the sick, and they will recover." Just to satisfy your curiosity, the only time Episcopalians hear those verses is on April 25th, the Feast of Saint Mark. And stricter groups follow 1Timothy 2:9. "9 also that the women should dress themselves modestly and decently in suitable clothing, not with their hair braided, or with gold, pearls, or expensive clothes." (Proper 23C, Pentecost 21)

Half of our church year is defined by the # of weeks after Pentecost it is. And yet, I skip over that fact. Perhaps I will remember the importance of Pentecost each Sunday. More importantly, try not to stereotype other faiths. Amen.