

## Pentecost Year A 2020

There are some things that are really great about virtual church. Other than the fact that we can worship in our pajamas from our couch, with a cup of coffee or tea, we have the ability to share things on a screen that we can't share in our 125 year old building...

So I'm going to begin today by showing you a picture of a marble statue from the 15<sup>th</sup> century in the Cathedral of Evora in Portugal.

Here she is...the pregnant Madonna. (see picture page 8)

When I first saw her she was surprising to me because Mary is not often shown as so naturally pregnant. First of all, there's not a lot of pregnant Madonna art from the 15<sup>th</sup> through the 19th centuries and the images you do see show Mary with a little baby bump or draped modestly, flowingly to minimize the appearance of her pregnancy.

But here we see Mary, as a human woman, very pregnant and holding her hand on her belly in a gesture every woman who has experienced late term pregnancy fully resonates with.

It's at this stage that a woman's body is stretched in ways she never thought possible. You can feel the baby moving, kicking, even hiccupping at this stage.

Moving around is hard; everything takes longer and makes you more tired. Simple things like bending down to tie your shoes become difficult.

The birth you have waited for is close, but not quite there yet. Your baby is a part of you, is known to you in some ways, but is still a mystery as is your new life after the birth. Will it be a girl or a boy? Will the baby be healthy? What changes will I need to make in my life? In the life of my family?

The realistic way that Mary is portrayed makes it easy to relate to her, to imagine what she may have felt as she prepared for the birth of this unexpected child.

I imagine she felt the same fear and the same hopeful excitement as most modern women. She is still visited today by pregnant women who pray before her for a safe delivery.

I've been thinking about her these past few weeks, because he reminds me of the hopeful, yet fearful expectation we're living with right now. We're in a kind of wilderness moment, waiting to see what comes next and wondering what kind of changes will come from the challenges we're facing.

It's a moment filled with the same fear and hopeful possibility Mary felt.

(Unshare photo...)

What does this have to do with Pentecost?

Matthew and Luke tell us the baby Mary holds in her womb was conceived by the Holy Spirit.

This is the same Holy Spirit that filled the apostles 50 days after the resurrection and that continues to fill the church today. It's our tradition to celebrate the Spirit today, but we might do well to remember the power of the spirit in our lives more often. The Holy Spirit is our advocate, our guide, the counselor who brings us comfort and sustains us. And we are in need of guidance now.

Where is the Spirit leading us? What does God want for the church in this moment in time?

Pentecost has its roots in the Old Testament. It was an important Jewish Festival that commemorated Israel's freedom from Egypt. It celebrated the giving of the covenant on Mt. Sinai and was about the new kind of community that was created after Israel's liberation from Egypt.

Of course we know that it took some time for that community to find a new way to live. I've always wondered if those 40 years, the 40 days of the flood, the 40 days Jesus spent in the desert were connected to the 40 weeks of waiting for a child to be born. If that number represents the time, the effort, the faithful patience it takes to bring new life into being.

Right now we are faced with a moment when we have the potential to draw on the power of the Holy Spirit to be liberated from our past and realize a new future that will bring increased life and prosperity.

The Tower of Babel from Genesis is also linked to Pentecost. In this story the people begin building a tower sharing a common language and in harmony together. As they build they forget that their lives and skills as builders originate in the gift of life given by God. They begin to speak in different languages that fracture their relationships and the tower falls in confusion. It is a story of how human pride divides us.

On Pentecost, the spirit does something new that reverses the story, it gives the apostles the ability to speak in different languages. But this time, through the power of the Spirit dwelling within them, they can now understand one another, enabling them to reach across human barriers to spread the good news of the Gospel.

What human barriers are we called to heal in this moment?

I'm sure many of you are reeling with the death of George Floyd this week. The video images of his death were horrible. To witness police violence is terrible, but to see someone powerless beg for mercy and be met with cruel indifference was terrible. It has been an emotional week filled with sadness, anger and deep frustration with a system that seems unchangeable. The violence that has erupted reveals

a country at a breaking point. Our policing practices, our methods of public safety, have been infected by the poison of systemic racism. Our tower has fallen.

How is the Spirit within each one of us responding in this moment?  
What are you longing for in your heart of hearts?

I believe that like Mary, God's Holy Spirit dwell's within each one of us. We are each one of us a human container for the divine spirit. When we allow our lives to be guided by the spirit, we long for love, wholeness and peace among all people and we come closer to living in the way that Jesus taught us to live. God's gift to us is the spirit within that reaches toward wholeness and gives us the power to bind ourselves together in love to heal the brokenness in the world.

Today we commemorate the freedom from what separates us and we celebrate the power to reject the status quo and the possibility to live in a new way.

The Holy Spirit reveals itself as wind and fire, two natural yet powerful forces that bring sweeping change.

When we were on our pilgrimage to El Salvador we celebrated the Easter Vigil with an enormous bonfire in a dry field under a huge tree. When the wind blew, the fire spread higher and higher and I was terrified, imagining that the whole place could be easily be engulfed in flames. It was both a powerful and frightening reminder of the power of fire and wind, metaphors for the Holy Spirit.

Today we remember the force of the power given to us to respond to the challenges of our time. With God, we are not powerless. It is not an easy task, or one that we can control or harness. It requires a leap of faith and trust.

This is not a task that we can complete on our own.

God came to the seventy elders and put the Spirit into them so the leadership of the people could be shared. Jesus called disciples to share and continue his work. God calls us into community to do this work together.

What is your spirit longing for in this moment? Mine longs for wholeness and compassion between all people regardless of race, religion or political party.

The climate is shifting, we are held in the grip of a worldwide pandemic, there are riots in the streets as a result of our inability to respond to generations of racism, oppression and systemic poverty.

We are now living in a world where thousands have lost jobs and wonder when they will be employed again, more children are hungry than ever before. Some people live in places where they are expected to return to work, even if they are in a high risk group and are forced to choose between their jobs or their lives. The pandemic is impacting people of color at much higher rates.

Some people have lamented that churches are closed, but we are evidence that the church is more than a building, and more than a people who gather together physically in one place. We are the church however and whenever we gather and we are faced in this moment with a great opportunity to bring new life to the world.

The church has held together before in times of political unrest, bringing calm and clear headed non violent protest to impact real change. We are faced with another moment now that requires that we pay attention to God's dream for the great reversal that empowers the powerless and brings us back into a community that breaks down the barriers that separate us.

My prayer is that we join hands and draw on the power of the Holy Spirit as we weather this storm that has the potential to bring about a new order that sustains the life of all.

