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St. Anne's Episcopal Church, Warsaw  
Day of Pentecost  
June 5, 2022

Lectionary Year C: Acts 2:1-21; Romans 8:14-17; John 14:8-17, 25-27

When events in our nation and the wider world overwhelm us, we come to places of refuge -- like the church -- for a bit of good news and encouragement. It may ruffle our feathers, therefore, if we come to the church and find ourselves challenged instead of comforted. Preachers like myself often find that they walk very fine lines as they manage social, cultural, political, and theological considerations in light of the assigned Scripture texts for the day.

I don't think anyone has been waiting with bated breath for me to weigh in on the recent shootings in Uvalde, Texas and Tulsa, Oklahoma, or on the recent local scandal involving the recently deposed pastor of New Life Christian Church. I believe that what needed to be said has been said by people far more articulate than me and who have far more influence on national and local affairs. However, if you wish to speak with me about these matters or about anything else that might be troubling you, please let me know and we'll get together one-on-one.

Many preachers, too, have convinced themselves that the "prophetic preaching" that they do is far more convincing and influential than it actually is. Moreover, on a personal note, I've looked back on old sermons of mine and found that my attempts at "prophetic preaching" were little more than me grinding my axe about this, that, or the other. I suppose one could say that I thought I was Harry Emerson Fosdick of the great Riverside Church in New York when, in reality, I was Ryan Fischer of the Little Church on the Prairie

in North Dakota,

Now, as all of you are thinking, "Whew, we'll never have to worry about Father Ryan ever saying anything challenging or prophetic again," I will assure you that this will not be the case, but I'd add that I'll try to be intelligent and strategic about it when I am so moved. And much as I might be inclined to follow my more prophetic impulses at the moment, I'm simply too weary to pull that off. Were I still fresh out of seminary and twenty years younger, though, that would be a different story.

Today's festival -- Pentecost -- celebrates the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, and the Spirit arrived, as promised, to take the place of Christ on earth. We know, too, that the Spirit gathered and formed the Church; thus, you may occasionally hear Pentecost referred to, quite accurately, as "the Birthday of the Church." The fact that we're still here as the Church approximately two thousand years later is ample evidence of the Holy Spirit's activity through the millennia.

And though, as a preacher, I might be wearied by current events and political realities, I have a Spirit on whom I can rely when I feel there's nowhere else for me to go. In his letter to the Romans, the apostle Paul writes extensively about the role of the Spirit in such situations. Today, we hear Paul saying things like "For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God" and "When we cry 'Abba! Father!' it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God" (8:14, 15c-16). Here, the movement of the Spirit directly affects the course of our lives, and our prayer, and our proclamation, and countless other things. We are Spirit-led people, as evi-

denced most obviously in our presence here.

Of course, some Christians tend to limit how they're Spirit-led to ecstatic expressions like speaking in tongues, and, not entirely coincidentally, we refer to them as Pentecostal Christians. And we can point to the decade of the 1970s, when charismatic renewal movements swept into all corners of the Church, the Episcopal Church included. As we can see in our reading from the Acts of the Apostles, there was, indeed, something "charismatic" going on when the Day of Pentecost arrived; we read, "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" (2:3-4).

This dramatic display of the Holy Spirit's work is almost a requirement for some Christians of a Pentecostal orientation. I don't think it's fair to say, "You're not a real believer if you can't speak in tongues." If that were the case, then I, for example, wouldn't be a real believer. Perhaps many of you would be in the same boat, as well. Remember, though, that the apostle Paul, in First Corinthians, chapter 12, says there are many gifts of the Spirit -- and tongues is but one of them.

More important to the meaning of Pentecost is how the Spirit has worked and continues to work through Christians and in the Church. Countless people have been led by the Spirit to the baptismal font, to the altar, to the pulpit, and out into the world to share what the Spirit and the Church have given them. The first Pentecost begat countless "little Pentecosts" where the Holy Spirit gathered people and still gathers people to this day. In the case of St.

Anne's, one of those "little Pentecosts" happened in a rather unusual place, the bar of the Hotel Hays, in 1950 when this congregation was formed. And Spirit-filled gatherings of any shape or size need not be wildly ecstatic; they can range from quiet and contemplative to loud and raucous and everything in between.

Again, a younger Ryan Fischer might've been compelled to turn up the heat and set everything ablaze today, but that can't be the only way the Holy Spirit works, if at all. Let us, therefore, find how God through the Spirit speaks to us in the silences and amid the tragedies and worries of the world. A lot of sound and fury may just be, in the end, idle bluster, because maybe God has something to tell us through different means and in other ways.

Sometimes, too, it may seem as if we're waiting in those silences and amid the tragedies and worries of the world for a long, long time...and the Spirit isn't working. Nothing seems to change or improve, no one seems to share our passion, and a whole bunch of people just don't "get it." One of the fruits of the Spirit is (perhaps not surprisingly) patience. Now, it's pretty obvious that, when things are spinning out of control, we seek to bring them back into control with very good intentions -- namely, to preserve the safety and sanity of everyone involved. But when everything doesn't fall back into place, our patience is tested, and tested, and tested some more. And then we lose our patience, and, at that point, we, in a way, give up, because part of us says that this no longer is something worth fighting for.

But, with patience, we doggedly persist.

And at the very least, we know that the Spirit was given to us as Jesus prom-

ised, so that we wouldn't be alone amid either our struggles or our joys. In our Gospel text, Jesus tells us, "But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you" (John 14:26). Jesus said this, of course, to his disciples, but he says this also to all his followers thereafter, right down to us. We know Jesus because the Holy Spirit came to us as promised and taught us how to live as Jesus lived -- with grace, humility, courage, and faith. Especially in times like these, when we can too easily succumb to our impulses and throw patience out the window, Jesus' example gives us an alternative. We needn't be filled with rage, but we needn't be complacent, either. We need only consider what we can do with God's help and be Jesus to the world as the Spirit gives us the ability. Let us, therefore, be assured of Jesus' blessing as we go forward, knowing that he will be with us as Advocate, Spirit, and Friend.

Today, more than ever, the Church as the work of the Holy Spirit needs the comfort and assurance of a better way for all. Thank God the Spirit brought us here, and thank God the Spirit gave birth to the Church.

Amen.