

Pentecost Reflection  
Acts 2:1-21  
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We Presbyterians, we have not known what to do with Pentecost. It is a messy story, a chaotic story, a story of noise and wind and tongues of flame, of spirit-filled disciples saying things in ways they never expected or imagined, of spirit-filled disciples spilling out into the streets. It is a story that screams “irrational exuberance,” words that strike fear or at least a healthy dose of rational temperance into our hearts. We Presbyterians, we are the children of John Calvin who built his Reformation movement on the Biblical injunction “do all things decently and in order.” I will remind you that John Calvin was not a pastor but a lawyer.

We are children of John Calvin, we button-down Presbyterians, or as we’re disparagingly called, “the frozen chosen.” But today we recall that our pedigree did not start there. Long before John Calvin -- who, in fairness, also preached a passionate “ardor” along with “order” – long before John Calvin, we trace our lineage to this: to our Pentecostal birth, born of the wind and fire and very breath of God.

This is a radical and not altogether entirely comforting claim. One of my clergy friends, Leanne Pearce Reed, points out that this really is the Christmas story *redux*: in exact parallel to the way the Spirit comes upon Mary, and grows into the person of Jesus Christ, at Pentecost the Spirit comes to *us*, and we grow into the body of Christ. The little phrase that rolls off our tongue “we are the body of Christ” is meant not allegorically but *literally*. We are the children of God, heirs with Christ, offspring of the Spirit. God is in our DNA, and Pentecost is our birth story as a church.

And what are we to make of this? I find it spectacularly invigorating for so many reasons.

For one thing, no matter how hard we may try, no matter how inadvertently we may fail, we cannot take the Holy Spirit out of the church, any more than I can take my own father or mother's DNA out of my bloodstream. We are born of the Spirit, all of us here, we're born of the Spirit and even latent traits of the Spirit will sooner or later appear again, bringing new life, new passion, new clarity, to unfolding generations.

The Spirit does more than that. Like our DNA is doesn't stay latent, it folds into a family gene pool just like our own families do. Friends, you and I and Christians around the world, we share one parentage. We will find ourselves with stunning commonalities that show up everywhere even in scattered clans. Like blue eyes or brown, or straight hair or curly we find ourselves staring at strangers and discovering complete likenesses with those who share our Spiritual lineage: the gift of gracious hospitality, the trait of longsuffering love, the feature of energetic passion. The gifts of the Spirit are traceable, visible, and they show up over and over again across generations, across time and place.

And then we notice this. And then if we look carefully, we notice traits of the Spirit emerging in ourselves, in each and every one of us. Unlike Jesus, of course, no one of us carries a "pure" Godly pedigree and yet, each individual Christian bears certain traits, each one, essential traits, you and I. This requires us, of course, to rely on each other for the gifts we do not have; it presses us to appreciate and encourage each other to develop and express those crucial traits we don't have. My colleagues here already know that I do not carry the gift of administrative detail; but others here like Donna Birney, bless her soul, they do.

It is no accident that Scripture says *together* we are the body of Christ, and each and every one of us contributes something to it. It is no accident that the

scripture encourages us to look carefully at what we bring to the table. And so this day of Pentecost I invite each one of you to look at yourselves and to look at us collectively as well—to look for the pedigree, to trace the traits, the lineage, to discover it in yourselves and to discover it again in one another.

I am convinced that in this place, the Spirit is alive and well in mighty ways as we prepare next week to send our kids off again to a work trip with a goodly number of advisors. To go out into the world and bring the peace and justice of Jesus Christ, to bring the compassion of the Holy Spirit to those who are far off who need to know we care. I am convinced that it shows up again and again in our Sunday school classes as we see these children leading us and going out to be with their teachers to learn anew the Scripture story just as we once did. I am convinced as I look around this room that the Spirit is alive and well with those who sing the praise and glory of God and with those of us who cannot sing but speak with words unheard in the daily actions of our lives. Look carefully. Look at yourself and find what you carry. Not just your natural-born gifts, but your unique, remarkable, traceable gifts of the Holy Spirit. You are blessed, each one of you. You are blessed as a child of God not for your own glory but for the glory of God and the purpose of his will on earth.

Beloved in Christ, the Spirit sends us out with a mission. The gifts we are given, the DNA we carry, the DNA of Christ that courses through our blood. The gifts we are given are for God's purposes and will on earth. We are the body of Christ embodied now and sent out to the world. May it be so that those who know us can say as those earliest people did at Pentecost. We hear them telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God. In your own tongue, with your own gifts, go out and tell and act and BE the Spirit of our God, alive and mighty in the world. Amen.