

(Pentecost is the grand entrance of the Holy Spirit into the lives of people who had known Jesus and those who had not. The Holy Spirit is the agent of change – the power of transformation – and it calls forth faithful people to dream dreams and see visions of better futures for all people.)

In our great Christian story – the story we tell each year – Pentecost is the final day of the season of resurrection.¹

Pentecost is the explosive entry of the Holy Spirit into the lives of the disciples and many others.

It says that those who witnessed this event were “amazed and perplexed.” Some were confused. Others were cynical. Often we are too.

Peter reminds the crowds of what the prophet Joel had said a long time back. Joel’s words are not only beautiful - they are good for us too.

We need to be called to dreams and visions for it seems the world needs to remake itself from time to time.



Pentecost is partly about language and listening. People began to hear one another - even though they spoke different languages – came from different places.

We still do that. We speak different languages even though we speak English. We speak the language of our work – or fields of interest. In church we try to bring them together - and understand one another.

The church is a Pentecost place - a place to hear something in new ways.

That is one of the strange things about being in church – different languages.

Music:

¹ Adapted from *The Call to Holy Surprise: Reflections on Pentecost* by Christine Valters Painter, June 7, 2011.

Classical music – country & western music – rap
have different languages – and on and on.

Think of your own fields and the languages
that go with your work or your interests.
Think about others around you who speak different languages.
Pentecost is also about hearing one another -
for the Spirit hovers over it all.



Pentecost is about conversion.
Lent and Easter and Pentecost are essentially seasons of conversion
for people who take the stories of Jesus to heart.
Lent – Easter - Pentecost

Lent was a more interior journey –
a time of seeking forgiveness
for those ways we have failed ourselves and failed God.

Lent was a process of thinking about what we may need to go of -
let die in our lives - in order to make room for new
hope and new outlook on life.

Our Christian story gives us a framework
for becoming more thoughtful –
not just kinder or gentler -
but stronger – courageous – active
for the world – not just for ourselves.

Hopefully – during Lent we laid aside some of what weighs us down
so that we can move from the cross to the resurrection -
and now into an awareness of the Spirit.

Hopefully – we have more space within us -
more space for new possibility.

Surely there is not a person here who could not
use a little new possibility.



Let's move to what represents the spirit in our thinking.

We often think of the dove when we think of the Holy Spirit.

That dove is pictured here on this stole.

So - why the wild goose?

The wild goose is a different kind of bird
than the dove of peace that told Noah the flood was over -
or the white dove that accompanies the baptism of Jesus.

But it is attractive – don’t you think?

In medieval times they used to release hundreds of them
in the cathedrals on Pentecost Day.²

But then – the doves rained down more than light and grace.

The dove is gentle and graceful.

That is its limitation.

It is too sweet and sentimental
and finally not characteristic of the Spirit – not at all.

The Irish had another symbol –
one that seems to be to be a better symbol of Pentecost.

In the old Celtic tradition the Holy Spirit was represented by a wild goose.

Why?

Geese are not controllable. They make a lot of noise.
They have a habit of biting those who try to contain them.
Geese fly faster in a flock than on their own.
People say they make great “guard dogs.”

And isn’t that what you want
when you are about justice and freedom
and human dignity in the world.

That is no job for sweet and innocent doves.

² Adapted from William J. Bausch, *A World of Stories for Preachers and Teachers*. P. 474.

The wild goose comes not in quiet conformity
but demanding to be heard.

The Spirit drives people together - to do work needed in the world.
Sometimes that work is noisy and passionate
courageous and dangerous and generous.

The noisy goose of Pentecost appears under many guises.

It is the irritable people running drug clinics – helping people find jobs –
and the tired people managing homeless shelters.

The noisy goose of Pentecost
sends people who live in the most privileged
and majestically beautiful environment in their country
to build water tanks and latrines for an elementary school in Africa.

The noisy goose of Pentecost
goes across the ocean to take a dirt floor open classroom
and turn it into a computer lab.

And, along the way, share and receive the love of Christ.
It is not just money - it is relationships of endless value.

The noisy goose of Pentecost is about helping people talk to each other -
across the pew or around the world.

The noisy goose of Pentecost
asks you to support this little church with your best
so it can be a instrument of God's peace
in this ski town and beyond.

The noisy goose of Pentecost is the person who looks hard
at what we do not see or don't want to see -
frail women and small children in Vietnam, Indonesia or China
where workers cannot organize – work 18 hours a day for a handful of change
to make our fine sneakers, soccer balls, and designer clothes.

This list goes on and on.
And that is on the big scale.

The noisy goose of Pentecost
is aware of the world around us and doesn't mind making a stink

when it is time for you and I to make ourselves useful.

The noisy goose keeps up with us individually too.
When we fall away from the things we know are good -
when we don't take care of ourselves -
when we fail to live fully and faithfully to our values.
It is the incessant goose smacking at your heels -
or squawking in the background.



Think about the story of Pentecost.
The disciples must have made quite an impression.
If it had not been compelling - we would not hear about it today.

It is one thing for a gentle dove to descend peacefully on Jesus.
It is something all together different
when the Spirit descends like a wild, noisy goose
and sends you out of your comfort zone.

We get out of our comfort zone when we
connect with real needs in the valley and around the world -
and go and make relationships of peace and understanding -
when we break down boundaries that separate people.

We talked about spiritual practices of the resurrection for a few weeks.

Practicing resurrection is to be very alive in this world.

The Spirit descends not only on those with whom
we attend church services
but beyond to the ones who sit at the furthest
margins of our awareness.

Pentecost is a story of the courage that comes
from challenging the status quo and being the voice that is needed.

A 26 year old man in Tunisia about a year and a half ago
stood up to an injustice and filed a complaint.
But the civil servants - the people working for the government paid no attention.
This story from Tunisia is way back in the background
in the watershed of activities for building justice and freedom
in numerous societies of the Middle East - the Arab Spring.

You can see that the noisy flock of geese is a much better image
for the work of the Spirit on the move in the world.



So what can we take with us today – Pentecost 2011?

Be in prayer about your own calling as a faithful person -
and what might be in your horizon – as part of this church – or elsewhere.
What is your gift? What is your service?

Be in prayer and solidarity with the people whose lives are on the line
as they work to build just and free societies.

Be in prayer about how God wants to improve your life
so that your life has great and fulfilling purpose.

Watch for the nipping at your heels when you need to be reminded
to take care of yourself
so you will be around to do these things -
to be generous and share your love with the world.

Listen for the honking of wild geese
and let that be a clue that the Divine is loose on the world -
and you are a part of it.

Amen.