

Pentecost Sunday
Wicker Park Lutheran Church
Rev. Jason S. Glombicki
June 4, 2017

This is one of my favorite Sundays of the year. It's Pentecost! Today we get to use big words like pneumatology, and we're decked out in red. We also hear a variety of images to help us understand the Holy Spirit, including water, wind, and fire. That combination reminds me of when the planeters summoned Captain Planet. If you're not familiar with the show *Captain Planet*, it focuses on five children, one from each continent, who were given rings that harnessed the power of earth, fire, wind, water, and heart. These rings were given to them by Gaia, the spirit of the planet. When they needed help fighting eco-villians, they'd combine their powers and then Captain Planet would help.

Like the planeters' combination, the reading from Acts united wind and fire. We heard that the disciples were gathered for a Jewish festival to celebrate God's gift of the law. Then, seemingly out of nowhere, a rush of wind enters and fire begins to dance on their heads. The Spirit causes them to speak in multiple languages. It was unreal; basically, implausible. Some passed it off as drunken rants, but other realized it was the movement of the Holy Spirit.

Today is one of the few Sundays we focus on the Holy Spirit. Throughout the service, you will encounter a variety of images to better grasp the Holy Spirit. However, the Holy Spirit is elusive and hard to grasp, which is why there are an abundance of images. The common images associated with the Holy Spirit are fire, wind, water, and a dove. The planters would be happy with the first three, but the fourth is a little outside their familiarity.

In the planters' honor, let's start with the image of the dove. What do we know about doves? Well, the terms "dove" and "pigeon" are used somewhat interchangeably because they're in the same taxonomical family. What's interesting about this family is that they are distributed *everywhere* on Earth, except for near the planet's poles and the Sahara Desert. This commonality is related to their adaptability. With this adaptable nature in mind, it is no wonder that the Holy Spirit is seen as a dove. Our God is one who can adjust by speaking the good news to all sorts of people. The Holy Spirit adapts to all languages, races, and ages. She blows on both Wall Street executives and an unemployed migrant-farmers. She's pushes those with 401(k)s and folks without food. She is responsible for igniting our passion for peace, justice, love, grace, and understanding.

This urging has given her the reputation of being described as wind, fire, and water. While these three might seem unrelated, a characteristic they share is their movement. Think about it. Wind flows as it cools us on a summer day or when it knocks down a giant tree. Water has a familiar flowing movement seen in the lake's wave or even a cool shower. Fire's movement might be more difficult to grasp. Sure, a flame can pass from one object to the next. But the mind-blowing moment is what firefighters call a "flashover." A flashover is the moment when the temperature hits a certain point and suddenly everything, almost simultaneously, catches fire.

You see, the Holy Spirit is feisty. We cannot firmly grasp her. She moves like water. She pushes like wind. Unexpectedly, she appears as a flashover. The Holy Spirit is *always* active. The question is not *if* the Spirit will push us into action, but rather *how far* we will follow her push. Frankly, it's a scary thought. There's a reason Christians don't talk much about the Holy Spirit. As Barbara Brown Taylor put it, "We don't keep the spirit of life in the back room because she is shy but because she is dangerous." The Holy Spirit is dangerous because we cannot control her. She will surprise us at every turn. She will blow our beliefs back at us until we question if those beliefs

are from God or of our own making. Often, we only believe in the Spirit's activity when it's comfortable and convenient; we only believe when it affirms what we want to hear; we only listen to the Spirit when it gives us an easy getaway plan. If the Holy Spirit brings us something we don't like, something we disagree with, or even something that pushes us into an uncomfortable place, we have a tendency to do what they did in Acts – blame it on the wine! But you see, the biblical writers remind us that the Spirit works “regardless of whether or not we recognize it, agree with it, or accept it.”¹

With that in mind, this passage begs at least two points to ponder. I invite you to pull out your bulletin and find the blank space on the back page above our contact information. Use a pew pen and write the number one and ponder this question:

1. Where are you feeling uncomfortable with the Spirit's actions? In other words, where are you swimming against the Spirit's flow? Where is the Spirit's wind in your face? Where do you need to take a step back and discern if your belief is from God or from your own creation?

Then write a number two and ponder this question:

2. Where are you feeling enflamed by the Holy Spirit? In other words, how are you called to adapt so that you might speak God's good word anew? What is your particular response to the Holy Spirit's universal approach?

Once you've answered the second question, take out the blank notecard in your bulletin. We're going to use it as a postcard. Address it to yourself on one side and on the other side write your answer to the second question. Then, pass them to the center aisle. I'm going to collect them and we mail them to you down the road as a way to keep that flame burning.

¹ <http://www.workingpreacher.org/craft.aspx?post=4912>

One thing burning in me this week is the Spirit's push towards eco-justice. The scriptures tell us that God gave humankind the responsibility to care for the earth, but so often we use it for our own gain instead of caring for it with love. When we care for the earth, we also care for those who are most vulnerable, including the poor, island nations, and those migrating due to environmental change. The Spirit calls me to care for the environment so that all may live. For me, the Holy Spirit is my Captain Planet.

Well, there it is. The Holy Spirit is the cause of your passion for love, grace, understanding, peace, and justice. Be careful though, because the Holy Spirit is dangerous and constantly moving. Undoubtedly, she'll push you into holy mischief. Yet, she won't leave you. She is your advocate, and she'll journey with you. Thanks be to God for her elusive and holy presence. Amen.