

May 20, 2018 Pentecost

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Annie Dillard in Teaching a Stone to Talk: Expeditions and Encounters, Harper and Row, pg. 40-41.

Acts 2:1-21, Ez 37:1-14, Romans 8:22-27

John 15:26-27

The Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words.

People of God, join me, please, in that same spirit, in sighing: Take a deep a breath ... and let it out. And again, a deep breath ... and let it go. The Spirit intercedes for us.

It is Pentecost today.

The church is decked out in red, and many of you, as well.

We remember again the way the Spirit came that first Pentecost recorded in Acts, we heard it at the start of our services: in a rush of wind, in flames of fire, in that babel of languages, in the dreams and visions.

Truth is the Spirit has been around since the beginning.

In literally the second verse of Genesis, it's the Spirit, the *Ruach*, in Hebrew, the wind, the breath, that blows over the face of the water.

And then God says let there be light, and there was light, and it was good.

The Spirit is there already!

The Spirit is there: Rattling in those dry and brittle bones as Ezekiel wonders "Can these bones live?" Inspiring the prophets like Micah and Isaiah.

Anointing Jesus for his ministry.

The Spirit is there: Groaning in creative labor as we become what we are called to be.

All that, by the Holy Spirit's power.

It's Annie Dillard who famously asks, and I've quoted her before, "Does anyone have the foggiest idea what sort of power we so blithely invoke?"

Do we believe a word of it, she wonders, for the church is like children playing on the floor with a chemistry set, frittering away our days, unaware of the Spirit's activity, the Spirit's potential.

"It is madness," she insists, "to wear ladies' straw hats and velvet hats to church.

We should all be wearing crash helmets.

Ushers should issue life preservers and signal flares; they should lash us to our pews."

How's that for an honest public service warning, thank you Annie Dillard?!

Today with a little Spirit-inspiration, I offer a top ten list, of the David Letterman-sort.

A Top Ten List of why I love the Holy Spirit.

Number 10: I love the Spirit because she's all about stitching and mending,

stitching us together in community, mending the hurts, creating beauty,
coming up alongside us when the work seems like too much.

Number 9: I love the Spirit because it holds holy mystery.

Honestly, in our hurting world we need all the holy mystery we can muster.

Today we're thanking all those who make faith formation happen for our children, our youth.

After 16 years teaching our youngest Sunday School children Godly Play, Madhu Bhat is "retiring".

With Godly Play, Madhu has a way of inviting these 3, 4 and 5 year olds into the bible stories.

All hands on, they wonder about the stories and they get it!

Thank you, Madhu, and thank you, everyone, who makes a space for our kids and teens to experience
and share in Holy Mystery.

Number 8: I love how the Spirit surprises that early community, rushing through the room,

never hampered by mundane things like doors, but rather free, bold,
not held down, not pigeon holed, but fresh and flexible, alive.

Remember that United Church of Christ slogan?

God is still speaking. Never place a period where God has placed a comma, for God is still speaking.

Number 7: I love how Acts tells us that the Spirit is poured out on "all flesh".

Humanity, creation, we all have the Spirit.

I confess the ways I sometimes ignore this truth, perhaps you do also.

At my worst, I forget to honor this Spirit in "those people" or in "that group".

Who am I even in my own mind, my own heart, my actions, to limit the Spirit poured out on all flesh?
Forgive us Jesus, temper me.

Number 6: I love how the Spirit consoles our aching hearts, inspires our depleted energy.

The Spirit helps us in our weakness.

When we cannot pray as we ought, when our words are gone, when our fears are big, when our
heart is numb or breaking, it is the Spirit that intercedes with sighs too deep for words.

What a comfort.

As I've heard the tremendous pain in Jerusalem, in Gaza, this week,

as we've watched again the news from Texas, another shooting, we receive the Spirit of consolation.

Number 5: I love how the Spirit can make us brave.

Sometimes it's consolation that is needed, sometimes it's bravery, it's action, it's truth telling. We as a world, as a society, we cannot go on the way we are, and to change the narrative, we desperately need the Holy Spirit's courage and bravery.

Number 4: I love those dreams and visions that the Spirit inspires.

Peter reminds them of Joel's ancient words: Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, The young will see visions, the old shall dream dreams. Where so often we could see only problems, with the Holy Spirit, we can see possibilities. Somewhere in that creative imagination, in those dreams and visions, there is another way, a holy way.

Number 3: I love how the Holy Spirit is active in the church, and she's bigger than our institutions, bigger than the church.

Some grieve this, but I understand it as a safety for the Spirit is so often on the edge, leading us where we still need to go, and often we need to go out the doors and beyond our wall.

Number 2: I love that the Holy Spirit helped them (helps us) speak about God's deeds of power.

The Gospel is translatable into every culture, but it's not owned by any culture. As we pray Godspeed today for those heading out on to new adventures, as we transition into a summer schedule, I pray that wherever the summer takes you, you'll be listening for what God is doing right there. And when we come back together again, let us know what you experienced and we'll tell you what we witnessed—God's deeds of power.

Finally Number 1: I love that with the Spirit's fire there is breathing space.

The flames danced on their heads, but they were not consumed. There is this sense of space even in the flames of Pentecost. Fire needs air, it's needs breathing space, too many logs will smother the fire. But add a stick here and log there, and the fire breathes and grows. That is where the Holy Spirit is working grace in us and through us.

Dearly beloved, as our pace turns toward summer, even in busy and full days,

may you find the breathing space that you need,
and may the Holy Spirit fill you and renew you, deeply, today and in all the days to + come. Amen.