Sermon
The Rev. Andrew J. Stoessel
The Day of Pentecost
St. Brendan the Navigator, Deer Isle, ME
Year C, June 8, 2025
Acts 2:1-21; Psalm 104:25-35, 37; Romans 8:14-17; John 14:8-27

On this Day of Pentecost, the church gives special emphasis to the presence, the power, and the gift of the Holy Spirit – this holy and life-giving spirit that flows through the world, through our communities, through the church, and flows through each one of us. At one with God, "the source of love who breathed God's Spirit into all of creation", the Spirit is in and all around us.

This Day of Pentecost is often referred as the church's birthday, not St. Brendan's per se, but the universal Christian church. In the Book of Acts, before his Ascension, the risen Jesus tells his disciples, "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." (Acts 1:8) Staying in Jerusalem per his instructions, the disciples "gather together in one place" on the day of Pentecost. As we heard, "And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. 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." (Acts 2:3-4)

We don't know if they knew their respective languages beforehand – we assume not - or if now they suddenly became fluent. We don't know the specific words they said, though they spoke of "God's deeds of power." I imagine they talked of God's love in the life, teaching, death and resurrection of Jesus. We do know that the crowd was amazed and bewildered. So much so that they assumed the disciples were drunk, though it was only 9 in the morning. We'll assume, too, that our readers this morning have not tapped into the wine, sacramental or not!

While the crowd was bewildered, I've often wondered how the disciples felt. "I'm speaking Egyptian! I'm speaking Greek! I could never do this before!" Feeling empowered, and perhaps amazed and excited, they

spoke of the glory of God. Inspired, their words somehow cut through the cacophony of noise and movement around them, kindling within them and their hearers a warmth of grace and hope.

Like many celebrations, Pentecost has its origins in an agricultural festival. In Jewish faith, especially in the time of Jesus and the apostles, Pentecost is the next important festival celebrated after Passover. It was an occasion for the community to express thanks for the first fruits of the harvest, the early harvest. Later it came to acknowledge the giving of the Torah to Moses on Mt. Sinai, acknowledging the "first fruits" of people's covenant with God. And here, in the Christian tradition, we see "first fruits" of the disciples receiving the promised gift of the spirit, and inviting others (each in their diverse and different languages) to heed the good news of God's love for ***all*** in the life, teaching and resurrection of Jesus. An invitation to draw close to God and each other.

I like to think that it is not so much that Holy Spirit wasn't present to the disciples before Pentecost, but rather a special infusion has been given now. It is renewing, empowering, and ultimately sustaining.

This Spirit continues to move through the church today and its people – you and I. It is kindled and stirred in celebrations and its rites: baptisms, marriages, funerals and all. It empowers and gains strength through ministries of healing, of reconciliation, of hospitality and service to the wider community, as well as through prayer and study and fellowship. Through witness and care for all God's people. It enables us to "do more than we can ask or imagine."

You may have noticed that red is the color of the day. Red is a symbol of the Holy Spirit: fiery, energetic, inspiring. All of which is inviting and exciting, as well as intimidating and even terrifying. It can lead us into dangerous places that may transform and change us.

I was speaking with a young woman last week who is in the ordination process in Massachusetts. She spoke briefly about her process and journey, including being invited to go to church by a friend, and then (this was the dangerous part for her), going to coffee hour! She did,

eventually. A small step in the scheme of things. And now she is on the path towards ordination.

You may have noticed the red stole I am wearing, and the others here. Last week St. Brendan's celebrated its five-year anniversary of mutual ministry with Pastor Elaine. In her thoughtful, inspiring sermon, Elaine spoke of this stole. It was commissioned by St. Brendan's under the leadership of then Priest-in-Charge, Holly Antonelli. It was made by James Day, a fabric artist associated with St. James in Old Town. Holly and James became acquainted with each other their work together on a commission in the diocese to foster and promote understanding, healing and support of Native Americans, especially the Wabanaki peoples. The fabric includes pieces of fabric given by parishioners of St. Brendan's. There is a wonderful notebook the goes with this. I commend Elaine sermon's which, too, which was included in last week's newsletter. Elaine spoke of the Christian community as a "ecclesial estuary," borrowing that phrase from a Lutheran bishop. An estuary "being that place where salt water and fresh water mix, creating just the right conditions for an abundance of unusual and beautiful forms of life that would not be possible in salt water only, or fresh water only." (Elaine Hewes sermon, 7 Easter, June 1, 2025). In other words, a great diversity, where life abounds.

This stole, as Elaine said, represents "an ecclesial estuary of wild diversity" and "a deep passion for the well-being of all the world" – a oneness born of God.

The stole was commissioned for its use on the Day of Pentecost, 1994, 31 years ago! No doubt, that was Spirit-filled then, as it was last Sunday, as it is today. So much has happened in that ensuing time both within this community and certainly the world at large: challenges, losses, joys, celebrations. Through it all, we continue to breathe. We continue to seek the guidance of the God, Christ and the Holy Spirit. We continue to foster a sense of God's kingdom breaking in within and around us.

On the other side of the stole is an image of the boat of St. Brendan, signifying the journey ahead and trust in God and God's Spirit to lead the way. You also can see the red in the stole, along with the flames, as well as a dove descending. Similarly, here is another image, from a stole

my late Aunt Alice made for me for my ordination. Like the small boat launching forth, it signified a new start, a new day for me, a journey that continues on.

The dove descending through the flames, or invoking the flames, is quite an image. It stems from Jesus' baptism. The heaven's opened and the spirit descended on him like a dove. I don't doubt that God's Holy Spirit was not present to Jesus before that. Rather, like the disciples gathered in Jerusalem, that opening and infusion of God's spirit was like a massive, energetic, flow of love and grace.

We are reminded that in our baptisms, we were "sealed by the Holy Spirit and marked as Christ's own for ever." Not that it wasn't there before, but we are given an infusion and the promise of it being present always. The Spirit is in us, around us, in the air we breathe.

The very public scene in the Book of Acts, with all its noise and movement and people, is contrasted with what we hear in the gospel of John. Not the promise of the Holy Spirit, but the means by which the Spirit is received. In our reading this morning, the setting is the Last Supper. It is evening, rather than morning. Jesus is preparing his followers for an ordeal that lies ahead, which troubles and confuses them. He speaks too of a glory that will come, that they cannot fathom at the moment.

Philip, like many of us, seeks some factual, empirical data of God's existence and Jesus' claims in order to move forward. Jesus reassures Philip, paraphrased, "if you believe in me and the works, you will be able to do even greater thing than these…[and] know that this Spirit, the Spirit of truth, will be with you always." (John 14:11b, 17a)

"You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you…Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you." (John 14:17b, 27)

Then, as you know, on Easter Sunday, gathered in an upper room with the door locked and the air filled with grief, tension and fear, the resurrected Jesus appeared to the disciples. "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you," he says. He breathes on them and says further, "Receive the Holy Spirit." No loud rushing of wind. No

divided tongues of fire. Just a quiet, wonderful, reassuring, and inspiring voice and presence.

In both these scenes we find a re-forming and renewing of community and its members. God's spirit was present before, but sometimes a special dose is needed to set one's course for the new day.

Perhaps this is where we find ourselves this morning, hoping to be formed, re-formed, renewed, inspired, infused with God's Holy Spirit, infused with an energetic flow of love and grace.

In the words of RF Littledale, as we sang in our first hymn, "O Comforter, draw near, and within my heart appear, and kindle it, thy holy flame bestowing." ("Come down, O Love divine", #516, Hymnal 1982)

May we breathe it in anew.

Amen.