



Fire

Wind

Dove

NAYIRI KARJIAN, GENERAL MINISTER, LIVING WATER ASSOCIATION, OHIO NORTHEAST, UCC • MAY 20, 2021

Pentecost was a Jewish Holy Day, the Festival of Weeks, which fell on the 50th day after the ceremony of barley sheaf during Passover. The 50 days, of course, symbolize the 7 times 7 cycle of fulfillment year of Jubilee, a return to the beginning, a fresh start, a rebirth, a transformation. On that day, all daily work had to stop. People were to gather, worship and rejoice. Everyone was invited – master and servant, male and female, the elite and the outcast, the privileged and the marginalized, the one with social status and the one without.

That is how the disciples were gathered to celebrate Pentecost. They were not particularly in a jovial mood. They had lost Jesus, their teacher, who was crucified and raised. They felt bereaved and bereft. Then something unexpected happened. The Spirit came like wind and fire. Although many languages were spoken, the gathered began to understand one another, to comprehend their own calling, and what they were to do next. Fire and wind empowered them. The spirit of the Risen Christ emboldened them.

For us Christians Pentecost arrives 50 days after Easter when the Holy Spirit, the feminine side of God, comes to those gathered. Like all other holy days Pentecost is about transformation, as well as empowerment to begin again.

Many think that the Holy Spirit is always silent and quiet, still and mysterious. True. But there is more to the Spirit as She comes in Fire and Flame, Wind and Air, both powerful forces in the universe.

From ancient times fire/flame has represented transformation, purification, the life-giving power of the sun and energy. Flame symbolizes a spiritual power and force,

transcendence and enlightenment, the sacredness of the soul, its spark. It can be creative or destructive, perhaps devouring all created things to return them to their original unity. Its regenerative power gives it feminine characteristics. Fire brings passion, light, energy, power.

Wind/air/breath represents the essence of life, the core element of the soul. Its presence could be felt but not seen. Wind's breath and spirit give it feminine characteristics. The wind blows where it wills. It is free, flowing, fluid, hard to grasp or contain. It dispels ignorance and mindlessness, and opens the path for wisdom and knowledge. Wind is the vital breath of the universe; the power of the spirit sustaining and holding life together.

Dove is another image for the Spirit. Dove represents life-spirit, the soul, passing from one state to another, as well as innocence, gentleness and peace. Originally the Dove was the bird of sexual passion, and therefore, of birth and rebirth, hence its use during wedding celebrations to this day. Today, the dove stands for peace, transformation, the soul, and innocent wisdom, as opposed to the cunning wisdom of the snake.

All three fire, wind and dove, are the most commonly used images for the Holy Spirit and all three are powerful. They are symbols of movement, transformation and rebirth. This Spirit is powerful. This Spirit lives in us, in each human heart, fills us with courage, emboldens us for ministry, strengthens us for the journey, empowers us to be Church, and makes us victors, people of courage rather than fear. making us victors in Christ. During this time of "return," after COVID, it is good to celebrate Pentecost, welcoming the Spirit to breathe new life into us to be the Church in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Come, Holy Spirit!