

I had a different Pentecost sermon written. A sermon that called us as Holy Shepherd to continue to be the church during this time of physical separation. As the pandemic stretches on, I wanted to invite us to see the ways that God's church continues to be active in the world—even when it looks vastly different than our previous experiences of church. But then Ahmed Arbry—a black man—was shot by white-supremacists while out on a run. Because of a botched search and seizure, Breonna Taylor—a black woman—was shot and killed while sleeping in her apartment, and just this past week George Floyd—a black man—was killed by police on the streets of Minneapolis. In our conversations about the pandemic, we have talked multiple times about how Holy Shepherd has many people that fall in the “most vulnerable” category. But there is more to being vulnerable during this pandemic than age. Latinos and African-Americans are more likely to be diagnosed with Covid-19 than whites, and despite the physical separation that exists naturally on spread out Native American reservations, Navajo Nation has been a Corona virus hotspot. In light of these realities, I think we need to reconsider Pentecost.

Each year at Pentecost we celebrate the birth of the Church and the coming of the Holy Spirit, and this year more than ever, I think we need to be reminded that in the midst of chaos and tumultuous circumstances, God called God's church into existence. While people were afraid, the Holy Spirit came and empowered them to preach the Gospel. In spite of their own limitations and the difficult circumstances they faced, a small group of people faithfully followed Jesus and the Spirit and the Church came into existence. This same Spirit that came down at Pentecost continues to be at work in us today; we can trust that God is continuing to be at work in and through God's church.

If we read the story of the Pentecost carefully, the first act of the Holy Spirit might be surprising. The Holy Spirit did not come and get rid of those that opposed the early church. The Holy Spirit did not come and give members of the early church mystical dreams and visions. The first act of the Holy Spirit allowed the apostles to preach the Gospel to the diverse people gathered in their native languages. The people gathered in Jerusalem did not have to learn Hebrew to hear about God's grace and love extended to them through Jesus—God came to them in the midst of their beautiful diversity. The Pentecost reading that we heard today tells us about the establishment of the early church, and it tells us that this church was built and grown with diverse people from all over the known world.

So today, when we are contemplating how and where God might be moving and leading we need to keep the Pentecost story in mind. That as the Holy Spirit moves she is inviting us all to experience a unity in Christ that invites us to welcome and celebrate people that are different than us. You all have some experience in this. Holy Shepherd is actually made up of folks from Resurrection, ALMC, and those that have been at Holy Shepherd for a long time. Each of these groups has brought something special to share with the whole. Creating unity isn't easy, but you learned to make space for one another, to respect your differences, to celebrate that gifts that each brought to the community. It wasn't easy work, but it was worthwhile and important. It was work reminiscent of that first Pentecost.

That is just a small example of the work that the Holy Spirit calls us too. Our world desperately needs those of us that belong to majority white churches to look back to the days of Pentecost, to the time when the Spirit brought diverse people together for the sake of the Church. We cannot sit by and say nothing when black men and women are killed because of the color of their skin. Pentecost demands that we respond to the reality that while many of our predominately white ELCA churches have seen very low infection rates, our Latino congregation in New York experienced a 25-30% infection rate. The list could go on and on and on. For the sake of our siblings in Christ like Breonna Taylor, Ahmed Arbruy and George Floyd we as individuals and as a congregation need to come to grips with our white privilege. God calls us to speak up against bias and racism in all of its forms. We have to do the work of examining ourselves and our community for places where we have failed to embody the spirit of Pentecost—where God welcomed all children of different cultures and languages into God's church. Examining our own privilege and standing alongside our siblings of color is not a political stance, even though news channels and podcasts act like it might be. These actions are about following God's invitation in Scripture to be one body that treasures and respects all of its members.

This is a large task, so where do we even start. There are countless books and articles on the topic—*Beyond Color Blindness*, *How to be an Anti-Racist*, and *America's Original Sin*. We could read the ELCA's social statement condemning racism and white supremacy or look at the Augsburg Fortress curriculum on racism. When we see interviews with advocates from Black Lives Matter or family members of those who have been killed, we can listen and seek to understand instead of explaining away. We can stand up against racism when we see it. We can speak out alongside of our siblings of color who need better access to health care and resources in the midst of this pandemic. We,

together, can begin to educate ourselves about how and where racism strikes, and we can even begin to uncover it in ourselves. This is just the beginning of a very, very long list.

Naming our own privilege, lamenting the deaths of Breonna, Ahmed, and George, and taking a stand alongside of people of color will require work on our parts. It may get difficult and emotional. There will be times when we do not want to do it anymore. But the same Holy Spirit that breathed new life into the church at Pentecost is breathing life into us now. The Holy Spirit does not leave us to face our privilege and racism alone. God promises to walk alongside us, to bring change in us as we repent, learn, and seek justice.

Like the first Christians in the book of Acts, we are facing an uncertain future. We are still figuring out what it means to be and do church during this pandemic. As we continue to care for one another, to lift one another up, and to worship together in different ways, I invite us to also began to think differently about the ways we respond to racism in our own community. I invite us as a community to pray that the Holy Spirit would be at work in us. May we be a community that is filled with the Holy Spirit. May we be a community that stands for justice alongside our siblings in Christ. May we learn and grow together so that we may truly embody the oneness that the Spirit created on that first Pentecost.

The ELW offers this prayer, which I think is fitting:

Save us, O God, from ourselves,
from racism often cloaked in pious words,
from the machinations of white supremacy hidden in calls for civility,
from micro aggressions thinly veiled in arrogance,
from apologies when they don't give way to action,
from forgiveness without facing the truth,
from reconciliation without reparation.
Deliver us, O God, from expecting siblings of color to continue to bear this
emotional work, which is not theirs to do.
Grateful for the long arc that bends toward justice, we pray:
Grant us wisdom,
give us courage for the facing of these days,
by the power of the Spirit, all for the sake of the kin-dom that we share in
Christ Jesus.
Amen.