

For the people of St. Philip's
The Day of Pentecost, Year B
May 31, 2009
Maria Hoecker, preacher
John 15:26-27, 16:4b-15

(It's a real joy and a pleasure to celebrate with Rebecca Ruth Stroup, Jack Francis Budzinski and their families on the occasion of their baptisms.)

Today is also Pentecost . Today we celebrate the birth of the Christian Church. You just heard this birth narrative in our readings this morning. It's a strange tale about tongues of flames descending on a crowd and about people speaking together in strange languages that they had never before been able to understand. As our Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams said in a sermon a year ago, Pentecost is "the moment when the friends of Jesus discover that they can communicate with all sorts of people they never thought that they would ever want to be caught speaking to."

What's this odd story have to do with the Church? Well, it's rather simple. There's a connection that goes from the first day of Pentecost to this day. It's all about relationships. It's all about our connections. Staying connected is very important to God. Being in right relationship is so important that God breathed the holy breath of life into the Church to assure that we could all stay connected, not just to each other but, through Christ, to all of Creation throughout time. And yes, that especially includes our connection with folks we never dreamed that we would ever be caught speaking to.

That's sort of what being baptized into the Church is all about. That's what Pentecost is all about. Take the Anglican Communion for example, this global manifestation of the one holy catholic and apostolic Church. By virtue of our participation in the worship and life of St. Philip's, we are connected to our neighbors near and far. Whether we see the connection or not, by grace, it's there. We are connected.... through this parish, our diocese of Western North Carolina, through Province IV, The Episcopal Church, and out into to the world wide Anglican Communion we are in relationship with folks who don't think like we do...folks who don't govern themselves like we do...folks who don't talk like we do.....we are connected by prayer to folks we might never choose to speak with if it weren't for our commitment to our baptismal vows. We honor that connection every week in our prayers of the people. We are all connected as One Church, by virtue of our baptism, marked as Christ's own forever. We pray with and for all those church folks and through prayer we are linked to all the *neighbors* of those church folks. That's the miracle of The Church. That's Pentecost. That's what we celebrate today, when the mighty wind of the Holy Spirit blew in and Jesus' friends discovered that they could communicate with all sorts of folks who didn't speak their language. They had Good News to spread throughout the world, it became clear that it was their calling to spread the Good News far and wide....not just over the distance of miles, but through the distance of time as well.

For good or for ill, we are all connected. Imagine that we had in this place a very, very long piece of magical red string. I have it rolled up in a ball and I'm throwing it out to you, and you catch it and throw it to another person here. Imagine that this string could become as long as we wanted it to be and that it was infinitely flexible and could divide as many times as it needed to.

Now what if each of us could take one end of this magical red string and give it to Jack or Rebecca and then those newest members of our Church could chew on it for awhile (they are babies after all) and then Rebecca and Jack could offer the other end of the string to each person here as they encountered them. Each of us, in turn, could then extend our strings to those people we encountered, and so on until everyone here was connected by this magical string. In no time at all this magical red string would be woven throughout this place and beyond this place.

Think of how many people are here today who you know, think about where they go. You can understand why the string needs to be magical. It's a tie that binds. If any one of us decided to leave then the shape of our being together changes. Any change would be felt in some way by every single person here.

That's how it is with relationships: everything we do has an effect on others, either directly or indirectly. That's how it is with our baptism and our participation in the baptisms of others. It matters how we treat each other. It matters if even one of us is gone.

Ah, but the mystery goes deeper. In our lives, as Christians in the Church, is not just about our connections to each other or our neighbors near and far, it's also about the connection between each one of us and God. Imagine that we each also have a vibrant red string that connects us with God. That's where the Holy Spirit comes in, that's the tie that binds.

When we deliberately gather together as Christians to pray and to worship, we acknowledge our connection to God and to each other. We have ties with Christians seen and unseen throughout all of time. In prayer and worship, the Christian Church calls upon the power of the Holy Spirit, through Jesus Christ to help us to grow into people who are rooted and grounded in God's love.

This is the church into which Rebecca and Jack are being welcomed and baptized this morning. Of course, they are not old enough to intellectually work out what being part of a Christian Community means...that's a lifelong journey...do any of us have it all figured out?aren't we are all discerning the mystery of God's love each and every day? The bible talks about a God who loves us like children. It often refers to God as our Father but there are also images of God as a mother. It is in these parental images that we can get a hint of God's love for each one of us...even as our own very human parents fell short of what God's love can be.

Wait a minute! Did I just refer to God as Mother? Yes I did. You see, in Hebrew and in Greek, the word we use for "Spirit" has a feminine connotation and purpose: ruach in Hebrew, pneuma in Greek. Increasingly, theologians and biblical scholars are returning to the use of feminine

pronouns to refer to this third person of the Holy Trinity. Both words mean not only “spirit”, but also mean “wind” and “breath.” She's Wisdom, Sophia, the Holy Spirit of God, the wind of God, and the very breath of God that we celebrate today.

It is the Holy Spirit that turned a diverse, motley group of fishermen, tax collectors and zealots into a community, a holy fellowship. These are folks that we would never expect that we would ever want to talk to. It is that Holy Spirit, that Wind, that Breath, that took those twelve, and others who were with them, and propelled them into the streets, out into the world, equipping them to go from being disciples who follow to being apostles—those who are sent out.

Today is Pentecost. It is the day when the Church celebrates her relationship with God and with all of Creation. Today we as Christians, seen and unseen, celebrate our shared baptisms with Jack, Rebecca, and with each other.

Celebrate this day. Listen for the wind. Breathe. Open the door to your heart and soul. Feel the breath of God's love propelling you forward, warming and comforting you, transforming and empowering you as move out from this place and connect with the world.

Today of all days, remember these invisible red strings of love which connect us with God, which connect us with each other in Christ, and celebrate the ties we have with all sorts of folks we never dreamed that we would ever want to talk to. Alleluia! We are One in the Spirit.

Amen.