

Sermon for Pentecost Sunday, 24 May 2026
St. Anne's Episcopal Church, Deacon Lynette Poulton Kamakura
Acts 2:1-21; 1 Corinthians 12:3b-13; Psalm 104: 25-25, 37; John 20:19-23

Let us pray: Almighty God, by the power of your Holy Spirit, speak to us in the language of our hearts, that we may hear your Word with understanding and answer your call with confidence. Amen.¹

Just over a week ago, I attended a workshop on writing for worship. Given that it was shortly before Pentecost and most of the participants were in some way involved in putting together Sunday services, the instructor chose to focus on Pentecost collects. As Annie told us last Sunday, collects are prayers that most often come at the beginning of a service. They are communal prayers, designed to bring us together in worship. In some traditions, these are referred to as the prayer of gathering, or the prayer of the day.

So, at this workshop, together we read and discussed thirteen different collects, coming from different Christian faith traditions and various regions of the world, all designed for use on Pentecost. Most were filled with beautiful imagery—"God of wind, word, and fire,"² "Holy Spirit, come as the wind and cleanse; come as the fire and burn; come as the dew and refresh,"³ Or one of my favorites, from Australia, "Wild Wind of the Spirit, we revel in the ways your presences live and move among us and through us—inspiring us, challenging us, unsettling us."⁴

During the discussions, participants admired the imagery and language. We thought that some were too busy, trying to cram an entire sermon into a few lines. In a few cases, someone took issue with the theology contained in the prayers. But overall, we were appreciative of the efforts.

Until, that is, we came to the following prayer:

"Living God, eternal Holy Spirit, let your bright intoxicating energy which fired those first disciples fall on us to turn the world again."⁵

Let me read that one again:

"Living God, eternal Holy Spirit, let your bright intoxicating energy which fired those first disciples fall on us to turn the world again."

¹ Bracken Long, Kimberly. Feasting on the Word: Volume I. page 173, Prayer for Illumination

² United Methodist Church 1992

³ United Church of Canada 2000

⁴ Uniting Church of Australia

⁵ New Zealand Anglican 1989

One of the participants spoke up, calling out the phrase “bright intoxicating energy.” She said that it sounded like someone had drunk too much alcohol, which we don’t want to encourage, so we shouldn’t use language like that in relation to God.

That comment left me somewhat uncomfortable. In the account of the first Pentecost in Acts, which we had as our reading today, the disciples and others gathered together following Jesus’ ascension. When the Spirit entered with a great wind and filled them, the people around them accused them of being drunk, so perhaps “intoxicating” was an accurate description. Intoxicated, not with wine, but with the Holy Spirit.

One of the other participants noted that, while that prayer might work in some churches, we—the Episcopalians and Lutherans attending the workshop—we don’t use language like that. We use reason, not emotion, in our services.

The conversation moved on, but this interaction stayed with me. I kept coming back to it in my reflections. Was this accurate? Have we removed emotion from our services? Is there no room for joy, for beauty, for the truly intoxicating power of the Holy Spirit, in our worship? Are we afraid to feel? Or to admit to others that we feel? Something? Anything?

As often happens when I find myself questioning something scriptural, I go back to the Bible itself. And one of the things that became clear as I researched and reviewed various passages referencing the Holy Spirit, or the Spirit of God, or Ruah, the breath of God—is that these are powerful experiences. The wind blew in with force. Flames of fire appeared. Bushes burned but were not consumed. Pillars of fire appeared. Columns of clouds swirled. Waters parted. Yes, there were some references to still, small voices whispering in the night—but there were also lot and lots of references to strong, powerful experiences which provoked equally strong, powerful responses in the people who were there.

So, when did we start viewing God in such a tame, toned-down fashion? When did the Holy Spirit become so polite? As the author, Jana Childers, put it, “Many Christians have become accustomed to thinking of the Holy Spirit as more of a Hawaiian breeze than a Chicago gale.”⁶ Or, as we would say, a true Gorge wind.

And when did we stop showing emotion in church? Note, I didn’t say, when did we stop feeling emotion in church, because I think that many of us do feel—and feel strongly—in church. We are moved by what we see, by what we hear, by the needs and cares we lift up in our prayers, by the great distance between what we see in the world around us and the dreams and visions of what God wants for us. We feel this—but when was the last time we shared these feelings? When was the last time we were so filled with joy that we actually felt the music as we sang? When was the last time we were so overcome with sorrow that we unashamedly cried? When was the last time we actually heard a spontaneous, unprompted Amen?

⁶ Childers, Jana. Feasting on the Word. Year A, Vol. 3. Page. 17

I don't have an answer for all these questions. However, in reflecting on them, on thinking about when and where and how we came to this place, a place where the force of the wind, the heat of the flames, the power of the Spirit have been so toned down, I realized that, at least for myself, some of that is because, with so much negativity in the world, with so much anger and pain surrounding us, it becomes difficult to open up, to open up to emotion, but also, to open up to the Spirit.

To feel the pain and grief of those families in San Diego whose loved ones were killed outside their house of worship. To feel the anxiety of those who themselves or their family members are in uncertain immigration status. To feel the exhaustion, the bone-deep exhaustion, of those in our own community who, despite their best efforts, in the face of rising costs, are not sure how they are going to pay for food, for medicine, for housing, for gas. To feel the power of the Holy Spirit, energizing me to act, to do something, to say something, to share God's love.

Sometimes it's easier just to say the words in church, to put on a polite smile, to avoid opening up to emotion—because so much of that emotion is anger and pain, or maybe, just maybe, that emotion will require me to do something, to say something, to respond. But Pentecost is a feast day, a day of celebration. A day when we can recognize that, despite the imperfections of our world, despite the pain and anger we may feel, the powerful, fiery, life-giving Spirit is here, with us, around us, and, if we let it, within us.

Personally, I have never seen tongues of flames over someone's head—nor have I experienced it over my own. But I have seen the Holy Spirit at work. I have seen the Spirit's gifts here, within our community. I have seen the joy on our children's faces as they bring forward the offerings. I have seen the peace that we share with each other. I have seen the gentleness shown toward those of us who may walk a bit slower, think a bit slower, than we used to. I have seen the discernment of those making decisions on behalf of our community, as we move into a period of transition. And most of all, I have seen love, the love you share with each other, the love you demonstrate through your generosity to those in need, the love you manifest through your prayers.

The Spirit came in wind and fire to Jesus' followers on that first Pentecost. That same Spirit, that same bright intoxicating energy, is here with us and in us, today. We just need to continue to open ourselves to it.

Amen.