

I just told our young folks that Pentecost is like the church's birthday. I feel that way. On Pentecost we remember and celebrate when the Jesus Movement took its first real steps out into the world, undeterred by the opposition it would face and confident that, even with Jesus no longer physically with them, God would be by their side.

It's a new chapter, an open door, an adventure waiting to be embarked on.

Frankly, that's kind of the way I'm envisioning this beginning time at LCOS.

After a couple months of talking with the synod, interviewing with the Call Committee, talking with Council, visiting you all in April...here we are!

I am thrilled that the Holy Spirit has led *us* to this place: a new chapter, an open door, an adventure to be embarked on.

I don't want to be idealistic here: I am sure there will be bumps in the road as we navigate our relationships with one another. That's the nature of being in community: ups and downs, conflicts and resolutions. However, I feel certain that God is leading us to where we are called to be.

I mean, it wasn't all clear skies and open roads for those earliest Christians, right?

In the book of Acts we hear stories of imprisonments, executions, persecutions, and more. Those earliest believers argued quite a bit as they discerned what God wanted them to do. Which laws should they follow? What did they keep from their Jewish roots or incorporate from the Roman and Greek world around them? What would they embrace that was brand new? It's a turbulent time, with no obvious way forward.

...and yet, forward those earliest Christians went. Forward to proclaim God's love and the good news of salvation through Christ.

It is not an easy time right now. There seems to be stress and turbulence in so many arenas of our world. I remember, when I was younger, my family all agreed not to talk about religion or politics with my grandpa because it would always lead to an argument or a diatribe that no one wanted to listen to. I feel like, nowadays, that list is ever-expanding: be careful not to talk about religion, politics, the environment, education, economics, healthcare...or any topic that could even tangentially be connected to one of those.

But I don't think that not talking about these things is the answer. That only leads to echo chambers and getting entrenched in one's own opinion. When our only options when you disagree with someone are to change your mind or ignore them completely, we've missed the point. When we only see things as abstract concepts without nuance, we lose what's really happening.

This is *not* to say that we should never change our mind. It is good and honorable and a sign of growth that, when presented with new facts or a new perspective, we understand the world in a new and different way. What I mean to say is that we should be sure to be grounded in *something*—dare I say the Gospel?—that holds us to a standard of love and care and justice which prevents us from accepting every generalization, blanket statement, or harmful idea as fact.

Alternatively, by saying that we shouldn't automatically shut down communication with those we disagree with, I am not suggesting that we need to subject ourselves to hateful rhetoric or give oxygen to things that are patently false or harmful. Instead, I am convinced that *most* people, maybe not all, but *most*, want to know that they are at least being heard and not dismissed. And so, taking the time to listen does not mean that we will agree, but it does highly increase the odds that we will remember that they are a child of God and that the image of God is borne in them, as well as us. And maybe, by remembering that, we can find some thread of commonality to move our relationship forward.

How do we get started, or restarted, or reenergized to do this work? I think that's where the story of Pentecost comes in.

The Holy Spirit arrives and kind of upends the disciples' plans. Okay, so we don't know for sure what they'd been planning on doing after the ascension and after they cast lots to find the twelfth disciple to replace Judas...but I honestly don't have super high expectations. Given their previous track record of hiding in rooms or going back to their regular jobs, I pretty much assume that maybe they would have eventually gotten around to doing some evangelizing, but it wouldn't happen too fast and it wouldn't be too innovative. (Boy, does that sound like the Church today, much of the time!)

But lucky for us—and Thanks be to God!—the Holy Spirit blows in, shakes things up, and lights a fire—literally—that sends the disciples off to the corners of the world. I mean, what else were they to do, now that they all were speaking different languages? The Spirit gave the push—the shove—to get them out, proclaiming the good news.

That's what the Holy Spirit is best at—kicking things off, initiating some remarkable action.

In Hebrew and Greek, the word Spirit is closely linked and often interchanged with both “breath” and wind.” Does anyone know the Hebrew word? (“Ruach.”) And the Greek? (“Pneuma.” Yep! As in Pneumatologist.”) If we look at the most revelatory and game-changing actions in creation, the Spirit is there.

At Creation, when there is only a formless void and chaos, God's *ruach* moves over the face of the waters just before God says, “Let there be light.”

In the Gospel of Luke, when Mary asks the angel how can she be with child, the angel tells her that the “*pneuma hagion*,” the Holy Spirit will come upon her.

Two chapters later, Jesus' ministry is inaugurated at his baptism when that same Holy Spirit descends upon him.

Each time, something in history shifts, never to be the same again: the universe is brought to order from chaos. God chooses to become incarnate and live among us. Christ is baptized so that we may eventually become one with him in our own baptism.

And, of course, as we hear today, the Holy Spirit arrives to remind the disciples that there is work they are called to do. It is work that they have been equipped for, but it is a challenging and probably a scary undertaking, nonetheless. They have to know it won't be easy, but the Spirit is there: encouraging, comforting, cajoling, exciting. Every step of the way.

So, as we sit here—or as you sit here and I stand here—I look forward to discerning with you what work it is God is calling us to, the work that we have been equipped to do together, as we have individually and collectively been formed by our experiences up to this point. Do you feel something pulling at your heart, nudging at your soul?

And could it be the Holy Spirit, ever at work, encouraging you, comforting you, cajoling you, and exciting you?

Shall we find out, together?

Amen.