

Sermon, Pentecost 2022

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[https://www.lectionarypage.net/YearC\\_RCL/Pentecost/CPentDay\\_RCL.html](https://www.lectionarypage.net/YearC_RCL/Pentecost/CPentDay_RCL.html)

### **Romans 8:14-17**

**All who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption.** When we cry, "Abba! Father!" it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ-- if, in fact, we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him.

### **John 14:8-17 (25-27)**

..."If you love me, you will keep my commandments. **And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever.** This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. **You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you.**"

But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you. Peace, I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. **Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.**"

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Another day, another death.

Another minute, another massacre.

Even as we double down on our commitment to prayer and action, the powers of evil seem to double down on violence and destruction.

In John's Gospel (Ch. 14)

Jesus says, "I will not leave you comfortless, I am coming to you."

So we cry, "Come, Holy Spirit."

Jesus says "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give to you."

So we pray, “Grant us peace.”

Jesus says, “Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.”

So we pray. Still our hearts *are* troubled, and our hearts *are* afraid.

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In fact, I think it’s fair to say that fear is a profound and pervasive human experience.

In fact, I am convinced that fear is, at the root, both *the cause and effect* of all human sin and all human violence. Fear gives rise to violence, which gives rise to fear. And so, fear grows and the cycle continues.

I think I’ve mentioned before that I am part of a practice group that meets regularly to work together through the book, “My Grandmother’s Hands: Racialized Trauma and the Pathway to Mending our Hearts and Bodies” by Resmaa Menakem.

It’s about how fear takes root in our bodies, and passes from body to body and generation to generation. And it’s also about the ways we can choose to take steps towards healing and begin to break the cycle of fear and violence.

The book is specifically focused on how racialized trauma, feeds into the fear and violence cycle in black bodies, and white bodies, and police bodies in particular. But the author’s insights are equally applicable to other forms of trauma that humans experience.

While white supremacy is by no means the *only* example we can point to of how fear gives rise to sin and violence it is certainly a relevant and illustrative example. We know that white supremacy was at least one explicit catalyst for the recent mass shooting in Buffalo.

We *know* that the shooter in Buffalo was *explicitly* motivated by fear. The shooter was motivated to murder ten other humans because of his fear, as a white man, of being replaced. His fear of being replaced. His fear of being replaceable. The fear of having no place. Even as I scoff at the absurdity of his thinking and recoil at the atrocity of his actions, still, some deep, hidden part of me understands his fear.

In “My Grandmother’s Hands”, the author writes:

**“More than almost anything else, each of us yearns to belong. Within each body is this deep, raw, aching desire. Here is what makes white-body supremacy so pervasive and so intractable: *Beneath all the exclusion and constriction and trauma, white-body supremacy offers the white body a sense of belonging.* It provides a false sense of brotherhood and sisterhood, of being a part of something intrinsically valuable...We will not end white-body supremacy—or any form of human evil—by trying to tear it to pieces. Instead, we can offer**

**people better ways to belong, and better things to belong to.... Each of us can also build our own capacity for genuine belonging.”** (p. 147-148, *My Grandmother’s Hands: Racialized Trauma and the Pathway to Mending our Hearts and Bodies*, by Resmaa Menakem)

Hear that again:

**We will not end white-body supremacy—or any form of human evil—by trying to tear it to pieces. Instead, we can offer people better ways to belong, and better things to belong to.... Each of us can also build our own capacity for genuine belonging.”**

What is the Good News of God in Christ, if not an invitation to a “better way to belong and a better thing to belong to”?

What is the Good News of God in Christ, if not this unshakeable promise: We do not need to buy belonging. We do not need to earn belonging. We do not have to fight for belonging. We do not need to defend our belonging.

The gift of belonging has already been given to us. By the grace of God and the power of the Holy Spirit, we *already* belong. We have already each been given a unique and irrevocable place in the family of God.

As we heard today in Paul’s letter to the Romans:

**All who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, "Abba! Father!" it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God...**

Hear that again:

**You did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption.**

While we may continue to *experience* fear and anxiety, we do not need to seek to soothe our anxiety or calm our fears or satisfy our deep ache for belonging with a “**false sense of brotherhood and sisterhood**”—by our attachment to the illusion of “whiteness”, or for that matter, by our attachment to the illusion of “rightness”. We do not need to search for something “**intrinsically valuable to belong to.**” Each one of us *already* belongs to something intrinsically valuable.

**We have not received a spirit of slavery, to fall back into fear, but we have received a Spirit of adoption.**

The Maker of Heaven and Earth calls us “children”. The One Who Sits at the Right Hand of the Father calls us “beloved”. The Spirit of Truth, the Spirit of Life abides with us and is in

us. We already belong. And so—in the eyes of our Loving God— did the shooter in Buffalo...and the shooter in Uvalde...and the shooter in Tulsa. And so does the President of Russia. And so does every other person whose fear is made manifest in violence and the destruction of life. If only they knew. If only they could hear it. If only they could believe it. If only WE knew. If only WE could hear it. If only WE could believe.

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During the Season of Eastertide, I had the privilege of telling a series of stories in our Godly Play class about the Resurrection appearances of Jesus. The series is called “Knowing Jesus in a New Way”. We share the story of the women and the empty tomb, where Jesus is “Known in Absence”, and the story of the Road to Emmaus, where Jesus is “Known in the Breaking of Bread” and the story of Thomas, where Jesus is “Known in Doubt.” On the 5th Sunday of Easter, we share the story called “Known in Making Him Known” where Jesus meets his disciples on a Mountain outside of Galilee. It goes like this:

**“They gathered together and went to the Mountain to meet Jesus. He was already there. It was good to see him, even in this new way. But what were they supposed to do now?”**

**Listen. He was talking again. What was that? ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.’ What was he talking about? Then he said something they could understand, but did not want to hear.**

**‘Go everywhere. Tell my story to everyone. Tell them the story, so that they can become part of it.’**

The story goes on to tell how, not long after that, Jesus gathered again with the disciples on another Mountain, this time near Jerusalem. And he went up into heaven and then, ten days later, on the feast of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit came down.

The Holy Spirit came down. And with the rush of that mighty wind, the Spirit blew open the doors to that upper room in Jerusalem, the same doors that the disciples had been keeping locked tight in fear since the day of the crucifixion.

The Holy Spirit came. And with tongues of fire the Spirit rested on the head of each disciple and lit a fire within each one of them until it burned so hot that they ran right through those open doors and down into the streets, to tell the story to everyone they encountered. The story of love and life. The story of resurrection and renewal. The story of adoption. The story of belonging.

And the story spread like wildfire...first through the streets of Jerusalem, then through all of Judea, and Samaria, and then to Rome and the ends of the earth. All the way to Albuquerque, NM. All the way to St. Mark’s Church.

That is the story we tell here, today. What's more, our lives have now become *part* of that story. And the Spirit is kindling a fire within each of us to share that story with others. And to eagerly listen as they share the story with us.

Today at St. Mark's we celebrate the Feast of Pentecost. And it is fitting that today we launch our annual Summer of Conversation Challenge.

We can think of this annual practice in the life of our community, this annual renewal of our commitment to intentional conversations and storytelling, in a variety of ways. It is the chance to enter into a practice of belonging. It is the chance to welcome others into a practice of belonging.

It is a way to say "yes" to the command of the Risen Christ: **'Go everywhere. Tell my story to everyone. Tell them the story, so that they can become part of it.'**

Because the story Jesus calls us to share is not just the story of HIS life, death, and resurrection: "in a far-off place" and "once upon a time." The story Jesus calls us to share is also the story of OUR lives. Because God's Gospel Story is still unfolding. In pain and suffering, in love and laughter, in war and peace, in life, death, and resurrection, in ALL of us.

Is it scary to leave the safety of the upper room? To talk to strangers? To tell our story? To risk belonging? Sure. Of course, it is. But remember:

**You did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption.**

When you take a risk, and make the effort to authentically share your story, you increase your capacity for genuine belonging. And when you take a risk, and make the effort to intentionally hear the story of another person, you increase *their* capacity for genuine belonging, too.

**We will not end white-body supremacy—or any form of human evil—by trying to tear it to pieces. [But] we *can* offer people better ways to belong, and better things to belong to.... Each of us can also build our own capacity for genuine belonging."**

Church:

God has given work to do. God has given us opportunities and tools to do the work. God has given us siblings to share with us in the work. And God has given us the Spirit to guide and empower us every step of the way.

Thanks be to God. Alleluia. Alleluia.