

KGL+
Sermon
Trinity Church Boston
Year C Pentecost
June 5, 2022

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts together, always be acceptable in your sight, O God our strength and our redeemer. Amen.

At almost every developmental stage of my children, I have been told that these, in fact, are the golden years. In the moments when I had both children under two and a half, bleary-eyed in the supermarket, with a full cart of groceries and apparently no wallet on me; in the moments when the need for a potty was always three minutes after we had passed the last one for miles; and now, as each child has decided to be proprietary about what is “theirs”.

There is nothing which lifts the heart more than a blood curdling scream at 5:45am, only to find that there is a battle over the last frozen waffle, or over the tv remote, or whatever it is that the other child has, which until this very moment, held zero perceived value; but now, when in the hands of the other, is apparently the crux upon which justice and equity might be served.

It’s mine! They shriek.

Golden years, absolutely.

But they are also old enough to decide what isn’t theirs. That wrapper? Oh that’s [insert other member of the family, dog included]. That clearly dumped out vat of Legos? Claimed only until it’s time to clean up, and then nothing but plausible deniability. The trail of mud, water, blood, melted popsicles leading right up to the child in question, who then has no idea where it came from. Not mine, they say, with their cherry red or grape purple lips.

My aim is not to throw my children under the bus in this sermon—as particularly tempting as it might be-- because I can see in myself—and in people who are older than six, or eight years old—the same temptation to divide the world into what’s mine, and what is not mine. What I choose to lay claim to, and what I choose to dissociate myself from.

When my daughter tells me that it’s her Legos, her room, her uneaten dinner, I find myself puffing up in a *clearly appropriate parental* defensiveness and suggesting that all those items are, in fact, MINE. They are items I have purchased, created and shared with her willingly. I begin, myself, to participate in the claiming of the things only for which I wish to receive credit.

Consider the ways that my husband and I might look at each other when our child does something lovely—we did that, we say to each other silently, with that knowing, glowing glance. Consider the ways that my husband and I look at each other when our child does something

mortifying—clearly that’s from the other person’s side of the family genes, we say to ourselves silently, accompanied by a side-eye glare.

Or maybe we think of it as we might a parking space in the supermarket parking lot—that is *my* spot, we say to ourselves as we try to beat out the other cars to it. But returning our shopping cart? That is clearly someone else’s responsibility, not mine, we reason.

Consider, in general, what we claim as ours, and what we suggest belongs to others. What is clearly of our own credit, grace and skill--, and what is that which is not of our own doing, the problem of ‘them’, whoever ‘they’ may be, the circus and monkeys which are not ours to manage, which are not our responsibility.

On occasion, such boundaries are helpful and healthy.

And sometimes, they allow us to imagine and live into the concept that somehow ‘we’ and ‘they’ are separate.

But in the feast, the mystery, the chaos of Pentecost, we recognize that if we do believe there to be space between ‘them’ and ‘us’, whoever ‘them’ and ‘us’ might be, then we are sorely mistaken.

On that Pentecost Day, as the Spirit descended, the gathered were not only brought together, but they were given a moment of clarity into their neighbor’s language. There is nothing so intimate as understanding another’s idioms and colloquialisms, verbal endearments, even—and for that brief moment, time and space collapsed so that each person had the opportunity to not only walk in another’s shoes, but to think and speak in one another’s words and imagination and experience.

The divisions of language in that moment which could so easily separate us—consider how you might continue to change the television channel until you find one in your own language, or one which you understand—were not only diminished or downplayed, but dissolved. Each person was able to trust what they were saying, what they were hearing, how they were listening to themselves and their neighbor as the cacophony extended.

Recall for a moment a time when the concerns and experiences of another person became your own. When their journey, when their hurt, when the matters of their heart, invited you in to take part. Not as an emotional tourist—but as someone who could speak their language, could hear the intimacy of their words and contexts. It may have come in the form of a diagnosis, or loss, or changed relationship—one where we noticed ourselves viscerally understanding and listening more deeply, with more love and respect, than we had before. When what was ‘theirs’ and ‘mine’ started to dissolve.

This Pentecost moment doesn’t last forever, Church. That would be too easy. It was a brief moment which was seared into the experience and mind of the community, where chaos became

grace—the unexpected dissolution of space between people, as different as they, and we, are. And because of the intensity of that moment, that intimacy, the Church—who are in fact, us, and the saints, and those who have gone before and those who are to come, the people who aren't here in the pews today and the people who will be in an hour or six, the Congregationalists, Baptists, Catholics and you name them, down the street, across the country, across the world, US, the CHURCH—we were begun and born into the world.

It's why we don't only pray for ourselves here each Sunday, but for our sister Episcopal parishes and those across the Square. It's why when we pray for Ukraine and Buffalo, Uvalde and Tulsa. We pray for those we know and who are parishioners here, and those wholly unconnected with us, who submit their prayers from across the globe through our website. It's why we take the time to listen to the stories of Black Americans and People of Color, because their stories may not be our stories, and precisely because of that, we are invited to listen with Pentecost ears to the intimacy of their words and experiences so that we may learn to love and serve better. It is why we baptize children into the body of Christ with the whole community present, as we will/did at the 10am service today—because the Church isn't a private gathering of friends, it's a living, breathing series of neural pathways where we need one another to create the whole body, all of us here, whether it's our first time in the pew or the 400th time.

Even our theology points to community—in the Trinity, we no longer have only the Father and the Son, or God and Jesus, or the Lover and the Beloved—not two figures, but three—with the descent of the Spirit, the very nexus of our God shifts from a binary to a dynamic community, interweaving and entwined. When we affirm our baptismal covenant, as we will in a few moments, we do not own it as our own responsibility, a personal salvation for ourselves alone; nor is it the sole responsibility of God to keep us good and holy—a challenge if there ever was one! No, we respond, 'I will, with God's help'. Even the promises we make as Christians are those which are neither 'mine', nor 'theirs', but 'ours'.

Each time we pray for another; listen to another; receive the sacrament with another; greet one another in the name of Christ, we are participating in the Church which was born on Pentecost because the Church is not one which we claim as 'mine', as my children might a coveted toy car. The Church is ours, and created only by the dissolution of separation and recognition of the Spirit, in all her forms, on each of us and on one another—even those who trouble us.

Episcopalians are far from being Pentecostal in nature—but perhaps it's time to rethink that. To notice what we choose to claim, and what we dismiss as not being 'of us'. The Church, in her sacred mystery, came into being through her imperfect, works-in-progress people. And she still is. And, Church, this mystery is ours to create and to sustain and to adapt and to share. Not mine up here in this pulpit. Not yours, out there in the pews. But ours. Graciously, abundantly ours.

Amen.