

PENTECOST REFLECTION
ZOOM GATHERING
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*If you forgive the sins of any they are forgiven them;
if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.*

John 20

Depending on your perspective, the first Pentecost might have looked like:

- a graduation party with banners and balloons, full of hope and joy
- a gathering of friends and neighbors for the first time after a pandemic lockdown—full of excitement and frivolity
- a peaceful march for justice—full of commitment and concern
- or a race riot—evoking and provoking anger, fear, and destruction.

Whatever it was, it was not a gentle, tame, predictable event. The wind was strong, more like a hurricane. There were tongues as of fire, wild fire. There was chaos and confusion. There was hope and there was fear. There was doubt and there was faith. As we consider the events of this past week,

- high school and college graduations with parties and speeches
- reaching the 100,000 mark of death cause by the coronavirus,
and each of those people with families and friends and co-workers
- ah, not to mention the unemployment crisis with homelessness to come
- then the killing of George Floyd and the unleashing of years, decades,
generations of anger and frustration
- slipped in was the launching of the SpaceX rocket at Cape Kennedy,
the first commercial and NASA partnership—
an explosion of expertise and cooperation
- all followed with a storm of tweets and political harangues.

Wind and Fire! But where is God?

As I have watched and witnessed, there is one common denominator in all these events.
Tears.

I have heard people say:

- On ZOOM graduation events: “I am so proud of my daughter, my son, by friend, I am brought to tears.”
- The NYT gave us a 4-page listing of many but not all of the names of those who died and finally gave us the opportunity to grieve over the incalculable loss. There were national tears.
- A young Lutheran pastor in Minneapolis, 8 months pregnant, walked the streets of her downtown church filming from her cellphone to show us what has taken place in real time. At the end of the video she breaks down and tears stream down her face.
- A Princeton professor and author of many books on the problem of race in America was invited on television news, “After covering so many stories of injustice over the years, why is the death of George Floyd so emotional for you now?” He said, “Because while he was struggling to breathe, he cried out for his mother.”
- And one person said, “Did you see the SpaceX launch? “It brought tears to my eyes.” Why? “Because it’s so hopeful.”
- I sat outback at the church this week listening to the silence and being struck by the surprising beauty of nature and I cried for the first time in a long time.

Yesterday, Presiding Bishop Michael Curry, published a pastoral letter to the Church. He titled it, “When the Cameras Are Gone, We will Still Be Here.” Yes, we will still be here.

But WHO will we be? This is the PENTECOST question. After the cameras are gone and the worse has happened and the sunrises again, WHO WILL WE BE?

Look again at today's Gospel Lesson:

*If you forgive the sins of any they are forgiven them;
if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.*

Forgiveness is probably not the first thing that comes to mind when we think about Pentecost. Perhaps we'd rather have a dramatic sign from God like wind and fire. While forgiveness is not the whole story of Pentecost, it is an important and often ignored piece of Pentecost. The book Archbishop Desmond Tutu wrote about his experience as the Chairperson of *The Commission on Truth and Reconciliation* in South Africa is titled: "No Future Without Forgiveness." We are those people who make it our business to learn to forgive. Forgiveness does not excuse or justify behavior but it does give us the opportunity to reclaim the original beauty of creation—and acknowledge each of us as creatures belonging to God. It's the only way to move forward with life. The alternative is to be imprisoned and destroyed by the past. But as the *Commission* espoused, there is no forgiveness without truth. And therefore, no future without both truth and forgiveness.

On this Pentecost, let us do what we have been taught to do. Let us be honest about ourselves and the world we live in. And let us be free to shed tears for ourselves and for each other. I'm going to read and offer the words of the Confession that we say together on most Sundays. I'm going to read them slowly so that we can hear these words and mean these words. I'm going to encourage us to cry together. And then, I will, by the grace of God, offer words of life—the absolution and forgiveness of our sins. This is who we are. People willing to cry. People willing to be honest. People willing to ask for help. And people ready to receive God's blessings and newness of life and the restoration of hope, not only for ourselves but for the world.

Let us confess our sins against God and our neighbor.

Most merciful God,
we confess that we have sinned against you
in thought, word, and deed,
by what we have done,
and by what we have left undone.
We have not loved you with our whole heart;
we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves.
We are truly sorry and we humbly repent.
For the sake of your Son Jesus Christ,
have mercy on us and forgive us;
that we may walk in your ways,
to the glory of your Name. Amen.

Almighty God have mercy on us, forgive us all our sins through our Lord Jesus Christ,
strengthen us in all goodness, and by the power of the Holy Spirit keep us in eternal life.

Amen

The Peace of the Lord be always with you.

AMEN.