

CONNECT! SUNDAY REFLECTION

Pentecost Sunday | For Sunday, June 9th, 2019

The Messy Joy of The Holy Spirit

Written by Anna Carter

Acts 2:1-11

1 Corinthians 12:3b-7, 12-13

John 20:19-23



Recently, I finally watched an episode of [“Tidying Up with Marie Kondo.”](#) In some ways, it can feel similar to other reality shows featuring people dismantling their hoarding spaces and loading unwanted things in boxes and bins. The homes are actually pretty organized, I noticed. Things look nice and neat, at least for the TV camera crew. Marie Kondo’s KonMari method is fairly simple. Make a giant mess of one area and go through each item at a time. Here’s the kicker. Does the item “spark joy”? If not, it’s out. All too often, my spiritual life can feel like it’s in need of the KonMari method. Here’s why.

It’s not necessarily that my external or internal spaces aren’t organized. If I’m a hoarder, at least I’ve got the labeled boxes to make sense of it. My problem is that I manage the Holy Spirit. I’d like his help when I need to make a particularly tough decision, or when I’m encountering a person whose emotional life feels outside my scope of experience. But when I’m making a choice about my free time or some of the deeper fears and worries of my own heart? I’d like to handle that on my own, thank you very much. In my experience, God has a tendency to bring the mess before He brings the joy.

How about the rest of you? In our busy lives, perhaps we allot God His portion on Sunday mornings and move on to the next thing come Sunday afternoon. Perhaps we allot Him space in our bank statements with our weekly or monthly tithe, write our check, and move on. In society, debates course on about religion being a private matter or a public one. In our Church, we don’t always do much better. Is the Holy Spirit something only the Charismatic Renewal care about? Do we treat the sacrament of Confirmation as graduation, a clear demarcation line between childhood and maturity ... yet somehow all too often a departure? Have we managed the Holy Spirit? If so, are we open to letting him loose?

The ancient Celtic Christians had a sense of this. They called the Holy Spirit [“the wild goose.”](#) For me, this image conjures up a few things, like how these birds can get crazy running around in a park, dropping who knows what mess into your walking path. But anyone who’s seen a flock take flight over a lake at dawn will know another feeling. Wonder. Awe. Gratitude for the God who makes it all.

The readings this Pentecost Sunday are all about God messing things up to bring us even greater joy. The Gospel tells of the first sending of the Holy Spirit. It's Monday evening after Easter Sunday. The disciples' expectations of Jesus had been utterly upended by the events of the Passion. Now they've heard rumors of Christ's resurrection, but don't yet believe it for certain. They're hiding in fear. Jesus entered into their midst and revealed his wounds, "*show[ing] them his hands and his side.*" In this moment of disbelief transforming into joy and wonder, Jesus "*breathed on them and said to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit.'*"

The first reading tells the story of Pentecost, the descent of the Holy Spirit in power. Just a week or so before, the Apostles had asked Jesus when he was going to restore the earthly kingdom to Israel. Talk about upended expectations! Jesus tells them to wait and to pray for the Holy Spirit. "*And suddenly there came from the sky a noise like a strong, driving wind, and it filled the entire house in which they were. Then there appeared to them tongues as of fire, which parted and came to rest on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit.*" Upon this reception, the Apostles break down the doors of the Upper Room and immediately begin telling the passerby of the mighty power of God in Jesus Christ. Eventually, they take this message to the ends of the earth, and even go joyfully to their deaths, knowing the truth of the glory that awaits them.

Breath, life, fire, wind ... these are primordial images. God uses them to remind us of something transcendent, not tame. The Holy Spirit at work in our lives goes beyond our compartments and neatly organized Christianity. For the Hebrews, breath and wind were the same linguistic concept: "*ruah.*" In Genesis 1, *ruah* hovers over the waters in the chaos before the first day. This Pentecost Sunday, the Holy Spirit wants to stir us up. He wants to hover over our chaos, upend our expectations, and show us a new, transforming joy.

We all have areas of our lives where we've put things in a few boxes and shut the closet door, giving the appearance of order. What if we opened that space to the Holy Spirit? Perhaps the Holy Spirit is coming in boldness, mystery, and power, like with the Apostles at Pentecost. Perhaps the Holy Spirit needs to first be someone we receive intimately, trembling in fear, like the Apostles in John's Gospel. This Pentecost Sunday, let God make a mess of your managed life. Let Him do something new. Let His Spirit spark into flame true joy!

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PRAYER

Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful.

And kindle in them the fire of your love.

Send forth your Spirit and they shall be created.

And you will renew the face of the earth.

Lord,

by the light of the Holy Spirit

you have taught the hearts of your faithful.

In the same Spirit

help us to relish what is right

and always rejoice in your consolation.

We ask this through Christ our Lord.

Amen.

— [Prayer to the Holy Spirit](#), from "A Book of Prayers"