

After the Wind and Fire
A Sermon for Pentecost in Three Voices
by Rev. Karen Christensen
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Scripture: Acts 2:1-18

Suggestion for the reading of the scripture: Have a few people scattered throughout the congregation stand to read this passage – simultaneously with the lector - in a language other than English in which they are fluent. The lector will read in English, with a microphone, so that the scripture will be heard plainly, but the congregation will at the same time experience something of the language jumble of the first Pentecost.

The Readers:

Voice One: The “reporter,” excited to recount what happened, what they experienced.

Voice Two: The worrier, often voicing his ongoing fearfulness, at least at the start of the tale.

Voice Three: The mystic, seems more attuned to the wonder of what has happened. Has a lightness of spirit/Spirit.

After the Wind and the Fire

Voice Three: Good morning. We three have stepped out of the pages of scripture this morning to tell you the story of Pentecost, to share our experience of the wind and the fire, and to wonder aloud with you about what comes next... after the wind and the fire. Thank you for welcoming us here in the heart of your worship.

Voice One: We were all together there in Jerusalem. Well, I guess I should say that we were all still together there in Jerusalem.

Voice Two: Some of us were still shaken and fearful. It had been more than a month since Jesus was... *[struggles to find the right word...]* killed. We didn't know if we were also in danger. We—

Voice One: *[Interrupting.Excitedly.]* We had seen him, though. Risen! Alive!

Voice Three: *[Spoken slowly, with quiet awe.]* Jesus had appeared to Mary Magdalene, spoken to her. When she and the other women told the rest of us, Peter and John went to see the empty tomb for themselves.

Voice One: Cleopas and his companion had walked with Jesus on the road to Emmaus, talked with him, even shared a meal. They risked coming back to Jerusalem to tell us their story.

Voice Two: And Jesus came to us there in the room where we were hiding out - heart-broken, scared, the doors locked against—against the Roman soldiers, I guess. Against the high priest and his lackeys, against our own people.

Voice Three: “Peace be with you,” he said to us.

Voice One: He appeared to us twice in this way, the second time gently chiding Thomas for not believing unless he saw him with his own eyes, touched his wounds. But all us – most of us, probably - needed to see him, wish we, too, had touched him.

Voice Two: We saw him on the beach as well – that time we dared leave the locked room to go fishing.

Voice Three: *[Laughing.]* He was cooking breakfast for us!

Voice One: Later we stood together on a peaceful morning hillside to watch Jesus – this man we loved beyond all reason – this man who had turned our lives on end - we watched him rise up into the heavens. *[Quiet pause.]* So why were we still in Jerusalem on this day we want to tell you about?

Voices One and Two: Because he ordered us— *[They pause to look at each other, surprised to have spoken together. Voice One continues.]*

Voice One: Jesus ordered us to wait in Jerusalem— to wait for the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

Voice Three: We wondered what he meant by that.

Voice Two: We wondered if it would safe to stay in Jerusalem.

Voice Three: *[With a quiet spirit...]* We wondered how we could go on with our lives without him.

[Pause as the speakers now turn to the actual events of Pentecost.]

Voice One: Seven weeks after Passover we Jews celebrate the feast of Shavuot, marking the wheat harvest and also the giving of the Torah. We bring two loaves of wheat bread to the temple in gratitude to Yahweh. In our time, the Greeks called this celebration Pentecost.

Voice Three: So Jerusalem, which is a densely populated city anyway, was once again overflowing, bustling with pilgrims who had come to celebrate Shavuot/Pentecost.

Voice Two: Perhaps some of these pilgrims had stayed over after the celebration of Passover?

Voice Three: [*Sounding doubtful.*] Perhaps— Seven weeks?

Voice Two: I only wondered if some of these people might be the same ones who had shouted, “Crucify him!”

Voice One: [*Respectful pause.*] We were all sitting about in the house where we had been staying. Perhaps we were still “hiding out.” We had not yet gone to the temple to make our Shavuot offerings.

Voice Three: May I tell this part? [*The others nod their assent. He continues with awe.*] Suddenly, Suddenly(!) there was a rush of wind, an explosion of wind. Loud! Fierce! It filled the whole house—then was gone as abruptly as it had come.

Voice Two: Wouldn’t you think we’d all be frightened? But we weren’t! Everything happened so fast that—

Voice One: [*Interrupting*] After the wind—fire! [*Speaking excitedly.*] The wind brought us all to our feet. Then something like tongues of fire hovered all about us in the air, one settling onto each of our heads.

Voice Three: What happened next? It was probably different for each of us. Here’s what I experienced: I saw the tongues of flame all around us in the air and atop each of us. I felt the warmth on my own head. Then— [*Awe*] that warmth dropped – dropped and spread to fill my whole being and—

Voice One: [*Interrupting*] That was my experience as well! Then it was as if that wind and fire and warmth propelled us out of the house and into the crowded street.

Voice Two: Me too! The force of the wind and the fire pushed us out from the safety of the house to—

Voice Three: [*Interrupting - excitedly*] —to tell the people in the street about Jesus—about his life, about what he did and what he taught us and what he asks of us.

Voice One: Ha! When we stepped outside a crowd had already gathered. They had heard that explosive rush of wind and were puzzled, drawn to the house...

Voice Three: [*Laughing – indicating Two*] You were speaking fluently about Jesus—in a clear Phrygian dialect. How did that happen?

Voice Two: [*Countering*] And you [*Gesturing toward Three*] had a crowd of Egyptians hanging on your every word. When did you ever learn to speak their language?

Voice One: Mesopotamian! I found myself telling about Jesus' resurrection to a bevy of Mesopotamians. None of them spoke Hebrew, but they were clearly entranced by the story that I was apparently telling them in their own language.

Voice Three: *[Laughing a little, delighted to be part of this tale-telling.]* Please. Don't mistake our delight in telling you our story for disrespect. We were profoundly privileged to share what we had experienced of Jesus.

Voice One: And what happened to us was not magic or trickery. Yahweh's Spirit had somehow exploded in our midst, within us as well, and we were changed forever.

Voice Two: I forgot to be afraid. If you knew me at all, you would understand that my letting go of my fearfulness was an extraordinary gift that came with the wind and the fire. *[Three and One turn to smile at him.]*

Voice Three: We weren't appreciated by everyone in that crowd, though. Someone called out over the bustle and noise to say, "They are filled with new wine." Another shouted, disgustedly, "Drunkards! Every one of them!"

Voice One: Peter (our fearless leader, he turned out to be)—Peter told the crowd that we couldn't be drunk because it was only 9 o'clock in the morning.

Voice Three: *[Laughing.]* As if he'd never met anyone so drawn to drink that they'd be drunk before noon.

Voice Two: But didn't Peter find just the perfect scripture to share with them? Quoting from the prophet Joel, reminding them of Yahweh's promise to pour out his Spirit on all flesh?

Voice One: *[In awe.]* We had the privilege, the gift, the blessing, of experiencing what Joel wrote of. We were washed in the Spirit, baptized – just as Jesus had promised.

Voice Three: And not only us. As we spread out among the people, as we spoke about Jesus, people listened! They must have been hungry for just such words of love and forgiveness, healing and community. Before the day was over three thousand of these good souls were baptized!

Voice Two: We understand that this—miracle, is why you celebrate this day of Pentecost as the birth day of the church – a moment in time when the urge to follow Jesus, to shape lives around his teachings, exploded into the ancient world in much the

same manner that the wind and fire had come with explosive power into that house in Jerusalem.

Voice One: We celebrate this with you today. Before we go, though, we would like to invite you to imagine the end of that day of Pentecost. Imagine us, the original followers of Jesus, coming back to the house where we had been hiding – coming back exhausted and exhilarated.

Voice Three: As we entered the house we began opening every window that we had closed in fear.

Voice Two: I had been the one to make sure they were kept closed, but now I opened as many as I could - with joy, with a kind of wild abandon.

Voice Three: Someone had the foresight to bring in bread and wine and cheese.

Voice One: We collapsed on mats all around the largest room, eating quietly at first.

Voice Three: Then we began doing what would soon enough become our daily practice at the close of each day.

Voice Two: Peter spoke first. “After the wind, after the fire,” he began, “after the amazing events of this day, how, then, shall we live? How are we to live the kind of life that Jesus lived among us? How are we to be in this world now?”

Voice One: At first it was quiet, but a comfortable kind of quiet. Then the words came - softly, reflectively.

[Softly and reflectively at first. Feel the needed pause between each speaker.]

Voice Two: Be the salt of the earth.

Voice One: Welcome the children.

Voice Three: Become like children.

Voice One: Love your enemies.

Voice Two: Do not worry about your life.

Voice Three: Forgive – seventy-times-seven times.

[With a bit more force... but don't rush]

Voice Two: Welcome the stranger.

Voice One: Let your light shine.

Voice Two: Turn the other cheek.

Voice Three: Do not judge.

Voice One: Give alms in secret.

Voice Three: Go the extra mile.

[Begin looking at each other, smiling. You are enjoying this!]

Voice One: Feed the hungry.

Voice Two: Welcome the stranger.

Voice One: Clothe the naked.

Voice Three: Care for the sick.

Voice Two: Visit the prisoner.

Voice Three: *[Speaking more directly to the congregation, perhaps indicating this by the sweep of an arm.]* After the wind and fire, after all these intervening years, after hearing again this ancient story – how, then, shall we live? What would you say? *[Allow time for response. Be patient. If no one responds, go on with the final lines below. If some people respond, sense when everyone who wishes to do so has spoken – then go to the lines below. Speak these words below even if someone in the congregation has also spoken them.]*

Voice One: Love one another.

Voices Three and Two: Love one another.

All Three Voices: Love one another.

[Brief pause.]

Voice Three: Amen.