

Genesis 11:1-9 Psalm 104:25-35, 37 **Acts 2:1-21** John 14:8-17, 25-27

OPENING:

During our weekly EYC gatherings, the youth usually begin our time together with an ice-breaker. This is where you go around the room and have to say your name and your favorite __ (BLANK) _____ (your favorite ice cream, favorite sports team, Marvel comic book character.)

One session we started with the following ice-breaker:

I asked: “What is your favorite part of the church service?”

I was not born yesterday so I prefaced the question that their answer could not be something like “My favorite part is the end.”

With that, we went around the room and people said

“My name is BLANK_____ and my favorite part of the service is __BLANK____.”

I asked our youth if I could share their answers because they were great and I think pretty close to what everyone in this room would come up with as well:

Some said

“The music.”

Some said

“Taking communion”

Others said

“The peace”

And, one kind soul, whose reward will be in heaven and here on earth, said:

“My favorite part is the sermon, you and Christine are really funny.”

YOUTH:

I share that story here on the Feast of Pentecost, on the day of our Parish Picnic, and, at the 10:15am service, where we will celebrate Youth Sunday and welcome five new members of the church family in Baptism. I share it on this day where so MUCH is going on to recognize and name that off-cited statement of church going that “CHURCH is BORING.”

Now, there is a close parallel to this in the place that young people spend most of their time, at their schools.

At school, there is so much is going on, so much happening above and below the surface, that it must be interrupted by periods of monotony and predictability to keep everyone sane. Columnist and author David Brooks makes this point:

“The students would burn out if forced to spend their entire day amidst the social intensity of the cafeteria and the hallway. Fortunately, the school authorities also schedule dormant periods, called classes, during which students can rest their minds and take a break from the pressures of social categorization. Students correctly understand, though adults appear not to, that socialization is the most intellectually demanding and morally important thing they will do in high school.”¹

LITURGY

Church may be a little like that.

I think that anyone would admit that sometimes that church has been, can be and will be boring. In fact, it should be. There is so much going on sometimes, that a lot of the time we need to spend managing just what God is up to in our lives.

The liturgical theory that explains all this is something like this:

The natural world and our very bodies are based on certain rhythms and patterns that are both routine and then exciting.

Life comes at us, hopefully, in usually predictable and humdrum ways but, then, also can sometimes be stormy and unpredictable.

Thus our church service models that, our prayer books grounds us by being composed of patterns of familiarity and routine and then certain toggles that change the service week by week and season by season. There is this Balance of familiarity and change, with a heavy emphasis on the former.

PENTECOST:

Imagine the alternative: if every week were Pentecost, if every week we were witnessing this dramatic outpouring of the Holy Spirit, that occurred on that first day of Pentecost. If every week, we beheld tongues of fire and all voice spoke the common language.

¹ David Brooks *Social Animal* 75.

We could not handle it, if this were every week.
We could not handle it in our work lives.
We could not handle it in schools.
We could not handle it in our families.

A story to illustrate this point: when we lived in New Orleans, people would come and visit and, of course, we would go out to eat at all the wonderful restaurants in that city and eat delicious gumbo, jambalaya, po boys, crawfish etouffee and what have you. People would always say: “how do you eat like this and not croak?” And we would say: “We don’t!..... it’s only because you are here. We usually just eat turkey sandwiches and pasta, maybe a vegetable.”

It’s the same way with our church life: every once in a while, you want a gourmet 5-star meal, but usually you just want home-cooking. You want something that will feed your body and your soul, it will nourish you, it will make you feel comforted and at home.²

SHIFT:

I know that a part of me is preaching to the choir here. That this is catnip to a life-long Episcopalian who understands the rhythms of our calendar, who takes comfort in the familiarity of the liturgy, that it was the same yesterday and will be the same tomorrow, that our *Book of Common Prayer* guarantees that something similar will be said all across the church on a given day.

And, it’s a bit out of place for me to be making such a big deal about this here today, on this day where so much is happening.

It’s a little like my parents, when we go out to a nice restaurant and they say: “Enjoy that steak.... Tomorrow it’s baked beans.” !!!!!!!

I could also be accused of excusing the church for setting the bar low, for justifying a tired and antiquated liturgy.

² Capon, Robert Farrar. 1998. *The Foolishness of Preaching: Proclaiming the Gospel against the Wisdom of the World*. Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans. 56.

CONCLUSION:

All of this is good to reflect on as the school year closes out, as our program year does the same, and we all are poised to start the summer.

Pentecost was the “Big Bang” event that sets the Book of Acts into motion, that sets all the history of the Holy Spirit and the Christian mission into motion. It was a thunderous, cacophonous moment—luckily one that does not happen every week—but one that is so fiery that we are still trying to sort out its implications 2000 years later.

Likewise, we are about to celebrate this incredible, once in a lifetime moment for those about to be baptized. It’s an astonishing act of commitment of love by their parents and one that will have implications for the rest of their lives. This baptism by Fire is so momentous, it will never be repeated, but it will require that the story of this day and this baptism be told and retold so that the strange becomes familiar, where this “Great and Glorious Day”³ becomes routine and accepted, so that their Baptism and all our baptisms become the familiar sequence of our faith, and the sustaining nourishment of our path of discipleship.

Meanwhile, the Church will keep soldiering on cooking and feeding to the faithful with its familiar recipe, as we shuffle into Ordinary Time this Summer, as our graduates go off to college, and the Baptized join us at the common feast, week after week. Depending on your perspective, those meals will be comforting and sustaining (or mind-numbing and rote.)

Just wait, it will all again burst out in unfamiliarity and sudden change. Maybe in a new favorite part of the service that you never noticed.

Throughout it all, God abides. God is present, God shows up. God seems absent, God is here in the times of continuity and familiarity and in the times of great change.

Or as Jesus said: “Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not let them be afraid. Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you.”⁴

AMEN

³ Acts 2.20

⁴ John 14.27, John 14.26