

Karen Hollis
June 9, 2019
Acts 2:1-21
Title
Um

During my first week away I was sitting in a large circle of clergy from the Diocese of BC. We were in a workshop on Reconciliation, and as we introduced ourselves around the circle we were invited to share who our ancestors are. Many people shared about family lines going back to the UK, some from Europe and other places around the world. Several had a particular grandparent or someone at least a generation removed who made a significant impact on their upbringing. And a few had little or no knowledge of where their family comes from. Every person who spoke did so with reverence. As I listened around the circle, I noticed how the energy in the room seemed to ground down as we shared about our ancestors. None of us arrived here out of nowhere.

When my turn came, I shared that my ancestors are indigenous to central and western Europe, the UK and North America. I was particularly close with my paternal grandmother in my young adulthood. I'm so grateful for those years with her and my grandfather.

How many of you have been thinking about your own ancestral line as I've been talking or had them somewhere in your awareness? Where we come from matters. For some of us, our ancestors in faith are equally as important. It matters where our faith comes from. It doesn't come out of nowhere, actually it comes out of the rich Jewish tradition that is still alive and evolving.

Do you know, Pentecost also has its roots in Judaism . . . I always thought it was strange the way it's phrased in Acts: "when the day of Pentecost had come." It makes it sound like they named Pentecost ahead of time in anticipation of the Holy Spirit's arrival. When actually, Pentecost was already a Jewish festival. Pente means 5 in Greek. Pentecost marks the 50th day after the Exodus, when Moses walked up Mt. Sinai to be with God and came down with the Law. Those were the days when God was made known on the mountain and in the tabernacle and only a select few, like Moses were able to personally meet God. As Christians we still count 50 days after the Passover to the day of Pentecost, but we have built on

the story. We remember how Jesus was raised from the dead and continued revealing himself to the disciples until he went up to heaven. Jesus promised the Holy Spirit would come down and be with us in his absence. Moses went up Mt. Sinai and came down with the Law; Jesus goes up to heaven (I'm not saying heaven is up, but the comparison is intentional) and the Holy Spirit comes down. On that day of the Jewish festival, all of them are gathered in one place and something so incredible happens. Luke does his best to put it into words, it's like a rushing wind; it's like tongues of fire resting on each of us. Moved by the presence of the Spirit the people have an abundance of expression, as the Spirit gives them ability. They attract attention of the people around them; a crowd gathers and leans in to see and hear them better. The people in the house are enveloped in their experience to the point those outside wonder if they're drunk. Why are they behaving in this way? This is so strange! We haven't seen people behaving in this way before. How is it I can understand them in my language and you can also understand them in your language? This is very strange and very new.

The Holy Spirit has come to the gathered community and rested on each individual. Those looking on live in the days where a select few meet God in the Holy of Holies; none of them have any context for the Spirit of God resting on ordinary people. They don't understand that God can come to each of us and give us abilities that are outside cultural norms. Peter recognizes that this is what Jesus had spoken about and interprets the event for the people. This is all part of God's story; Jesus sent us the Holy Spirit to be with us and guide us in our Kingdom work.

And so receiving the Holy Spirit quickly became a part of welcoming people into the family of Christ; and the tradition evolved to confirm new Christians on Pentecost, after baptism. Bishops and Ministers confirm the faith of individuals and pray with laying on of hands that they receive and be empowered by the Holy Spirit. Jesus transformed the days where a person had to deal with money changers in the temple and try one's best to gain access to God. Jesus sent the Holy Spirit to each one of us.

It is a gift that has been passed down in the church all these years. Our ancestors in faith, from this Pentecostal gathering forward received the Holy Spirit. Many of our own ancestors also received the Holy Spirit in what became Confirmation. It was passed down generation after generation to us, that we may know the power of the Spirit in our own lives and context.

Before I left for my denominational meetings and study time I met with the steering group for our visioning process . . . yes, we are still gearing up for a visioning process. 2 years ago we answered God's call to amalgamate and become an ecumenical community of Christians, open to stretching our comfort zones and living a bit into the unknown. We're not able to predict who we will become as a shared ministry, and still were willing to take that huge first step in faith. We continue to be in the hands of the Holy Spirit who comforts, afflicts, and leads us to the right next steps as we participate in God's story.

Yesterday I was at yet another Anglican gathering . . . this time of parishes in our Cowichan Malaspina Region. We were talking about what brings us hope in the church and all of a sudden, the wind from outside WHAM, blew the door shut and everyone stopped and looked, several remarking that the winds of Pentecost are already with us. Hope in the church rests on many things, including our ability to allow the Holy Spirit to lead us, as she led our ancestors. This is a critical time in the world and a critical time in the broader church. Each of us in our little island church are part of God's larger story and we have a role to play. So as the winds of Pentecost blow today, let us pray for God to speak so that we may hear. Let us listen for God speaking into that question, what is our call? What is our role here and now in your larger story? Come Holy Spirit and speak to us in ways we can hear. We long to hear your voice. Thank you for your faithfulness to our ancestors and to us.