

## **Pentecost, Year B – Masada – 20 May 2018**

[Acts 2:1-21, Psalm 104:25-35, 37, Romans 8:22-27, John 15:26-27; 16:4b-15](#)

---

The Pentecost story reads like a tale of the supernatural or a scene from a sci-fi film.

“And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.”

Universal understanding in the midst of swirling confusion – order and chaos coexisting – that is the magic and mystery of Pentecost.

Speaking of magic and mystery, I am in the throes of adoring the land. I do it every year, I can't help myself. Now, please understand that I'm no good at gardening; I have a brown thumb for everything but dandelions and thistles; anyone who passes my yard can see that. However, I do love going crazy with my camera, snapping images of flowers, budding trees, tiny violets, pink carpets of petals, fiddlehead ferns unfurling, hostas emerging.

Photos can capture the magical power of spring. Before our eyes, the spring landscape bursts with potential. It swells with brand new, bright green plant life.

But let's look at it from another angle: what if you're the tiny plant? The plant that was frost bitten or bug ridden? The plant hit by drought? Or a plant burnt by raging fire? Will you survive?

Well, you don't know what will happen. But despite the uncertainty, you DO have hope. You have the Divine order of nature that breaks through chaos, the structure of life, a scaffolding beneath you.

And so you germinate, your tender new leaves peeking through the soil. Your view is narrow at first, until your leaves uncurl and broaden and your branches spread and spread.

In nature, order and chaos coexist.

But it's different for us as humans, right? We are quite certain our world is ordered; we are certain that we are in control. After all, we know things about the world because we have observed and studied it over time. Spring comes every year. We're certain of that. And we like that certainty.

Generally speaking we humans don't like to feel as though things are out of control. But in reality, we are just like the tiny plant. Being human means living with uncertainty.

Still, we construct our lives to keep uncertainty at bay; we do all we can to convince ourselves that we ARE, in fact, in control. We look for order. We search

for meaning. We play “connect the dots” to draw conclusions about life as we know it. We draw comfort from creating boundaries that impose order in our world.

But the fact remains: life is made of both order AND chaos.

Order and chaos. There is a word for that: chaordic, coined by Dee Hock, founder and former CEO of the Visa credit card association. A chaordic organization refers to a system that blends characteristics of chaos and order. Yin and Yang. Oil and water. Hot and cold.

Life on earth as we know it is made of such tensions. Our universe is made of opposing forces, such as protons and electrons. Every living cell thrives because of the internal and external forces of turgor pressure that keep cell membranes intact.

The tension between chaos and order surrounds us and keeps us buoyant. This is especially true in times of transition, like winter to spring, spring to summer. Constant movement between order and chaos defines the seasons of our planet, of our bodies, of our lives. Being human means living with the uncertainty of chaos, BUT ALSO the potential to harness its energy.

On this day of Pentecost, the disciples feel the flames of uncertainty, yet are filled with understanding and purpose, as the powerful force of the Divine fills the space, fills their bodies, minds, and spirits.

The flames of Pentecost brand us with a chaotic spirit, embracing both uncertainty and loving hope. Pentecost becomes a poultice, pulling feelings from the deep and forging them with loving hope.

The flame of loving hope is:

- Creative
- Just
- Contagious
- Healing
- Timeless
- Rigorous
- Unpredictable
- Transcendent
- Unspeakable
- Fierce
- Violent
- Gentle
- Divine

That's quite an idea, isn't it? That uncertainty and loving hope work in tandem to create life as we know it?

As people of God, we are invited to gather as one body to renew our baptismal vows four times every year:

1. Easter Vigil or Easter Day
2. Pentecost
3. All Saints'
4. Baptism of our Lord

It's interesting that in many parts of the world, those dates correspond with times of transition for our planet, aligned with planting, cultivating, harvesting, and storing food.

Easter occurs as the ground begins to thaw, just before **spring** planting. Pentecost is on the cusp of **summer**, as the ground increases in warmth and seeds sprout. All Saints' happens as **fall** wanes and harvests are stored. The Baptism of our Lord comes as the ground has frozen for the **winter**.

Baptisms happen at times of transition, chaotic times; times during which we need to feel God's presence, gather as a community, and be assured of loving hope.

And so, we gather today to remember how the Holy Spirit comes to bathe us in light – the light of the first disciples' experience of the Holy Spirit.

In this way, baptism is not a single event; it is a time of renewal that comes to us over and over to inspire us, to help us to feel the Divine within. Baptism is a poultice that pulls our emotions from the deep and forges them with the flames of hope. Baptism galvanizes us to take action in the world, to examine our lives as a community, to look carefully at how God works in us and through us. Baptism urges us to cultivate an understanding of God's work that we might aid people who need God's healing and loving hope.

Baptism calls us to celebrate the renewal of creation, empowers us to advocate for liberation from oppression, gathers us in the beneficial ordering of life together, and urges us to find creative ways to endure conflict.

Our baptismal vows help us embody loving hope. These words help us embrace the chaotic by highlighting opposing forces: times for action and times for reflection.

- Pray, share in the sacraments
- Resist evil, ask God's forgiveness
- Proclaim the good news by word and example
- Seek & serve Christ in all persons, love my neighbor as myself
- Advocate for justice & peace, respect the dignity of every person.

Today, we celebrate the baptism of Isabelle Mackenzie Allison Clark-Smith. We have watched and waited while Chris and Travis dreamed of becoming daddies. We have seen them welcome Isabelle into their home. We have seen them put loving hope into action as they faced uncertainties with the adoption process.

And now we support them as Isabelle's parents. We join with them as she is welcomed into understanding that the divine flames of God live and grow in her.

Isabelle, like all of us, embodies both chaos and order. She is fully her own chaotic system and is most wonderful because of it! She is tiny and mighty, like the small plant emerging from the soil in spring. She lives with chaos and order and as one of God's creations; she is full of the Divine and possesses super powers that are all hers. You know your superhero lore, so you know this is true!

In Izzy's world, Chris, you dare to be Batman. You use your vast resources to guide and shield your family. And Travis, in Izzy's world, you dare to be Superman, bringing amazing strength to fly through each day. Together, the two of you travel the world to bring Izzy the perspectives she'll need to navigate on her own.

Remember the plants emerging from the soil? The tiny leaves have a narrow view, like a child's. Try this: make a fist with your hand. Now bring that hand to your eye, and open your fist just enough to allow a tiny seed of light, a tiny sliver of the world to appear. It's hard to see much, isn't it? This is the way children see sometimes. However, sometimes their narrow view helps us focus on what's truly important. And sometimes WE are the ones viewing life through our fists, and our children's new, strong branches offer us a vibrant, uncluttered view.

All of us at New Song are fortunate to see through Izzy's eyes; our children teach us wonderful things every day. Remember that some seeds need fire to sprout!

And so, as you germinate as a family, your tender new leaves peeking through the soil, we here at New Song are by your side. We do this as a community of people who support one another in all phases of our lives, through transitions of every kind, creating order in the midst of chaos, and embracing uncertainty in the face of order.

*Jennifer Masada, New Song Episcopal Church, Coralville, Iowa*