

“Do you have any ideas for dinner tonight?” my husband asked.

“Honestly?” I replied. “I kind of want Thanksgiving dinner.”

Thanksgiving dinner. Never mind the fact that it was a sunny, 70-degree day in May... the kind of day for cooking burgers on the grill, not a turkey in the oven. What can I say? This season marked by coronavirus has me craving comfort food. I’m eating my feelings... so I might as well eat them with gravy and stuffing and pumpkin pie, right? Seriously, church, doesn’t that sound good? (In the end, we did not roast a turkey, mostly because there wasn’t enough time to defrost the bird that we happened to have in the freezer.)

But it’s not only my craving for comfort food that has turkey on my mind. It’s our “brown bag” series, too. Throughout our worship in this season of Easter -- the seven weeks between Easter and Pentecost -- we’ve been finding inspiration in the ordinary, everyday items (the “brown bag items”) provided by so many of you. Brown Bag is an annual tradition of mine, one that I always keep during the season of Easter. I do this because I firmly believe that Easter’s good news changes absolutely everything. I do this because I believe that Easter-morning change imbues ordinary everyday items with a glimpse of the good news. I do this because I hope we’ll learn to look for those glimpses of the good news all around us -- especially in this season of social distancing guidelines and stay-at-home orders, when COVID-19 has us all looking at all our same old stuff, day after day.

And so, throughout this season of Easter, we’ve found inspiration in the ordinary and the everyday... in a trivet, and an outlet cover, and a box of band-aids, and a hamburger patty press, and a toilet bowl gasket, and a fidget spinner. Each of these items has drawn us to the words of scripture. Each of these items has held a glimpse of the God who offers us comfort, protection, purpose, calm, strength, and grace.

And then I opened the brown bag from Barbara Reimers. To be honest, I didn't think these things existed in real life; I thought they were only in cartoons. Do you know what this is? Some call it a "chop frill" or a "turkey frill" or even a "turkey bootie" (which is both funny and a little disturbing, all at the same time). Think of it as a... a party hat for the "guest of honor" on your Thanksgiving table. It's used to make your dinner spread a little fancier and more festive (and to cover up the unsightly ends of roasted bones). Or so I've heard. I don't throw very many fancy dinners, and we serve Thanksgiving on the finest of disposable china, so I'm hardly the best one to comment on that.

Barbara's "turkey frill" does make me double down on my Thanksgiving craving, though. I wouldn't say "no" to a Thanksgiving dinner, church, would you? Even in May, even on this day. And why not? Today is a holiday, after all. It's not Thanksgiving of course (that's still six months and what feels like a whole world away). No, it's... Pentecost.

We hear of the story of Pentecost in the New Testament book of Acts:

[Acts 2:1-11, 14, 16-17, 38, 41, NRSV]

¹ When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. ² 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. ³ Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. ⁴ All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.

⁵ Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. ⁶ And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each. ⁷ Amazed and astonished, they asked, "Are not all these who are speaking Galileans?" ⁸ And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language? ⁹ Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, ¹⁰ Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews

and proselytes, ¹¹ Cretans and Arabs—in our own languages we hear them speaking about God’s deeds of power.” ...

¹⁴ But Peter, standing with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed them, “Men of Judea and all who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and listen to what I say. ... ¹⁶ [T]his is what was spoken through the prophet Joel:

¹⁷ ‘In the last days it will be, God declares,
that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh’ ...

³⁸ Peter said to them, “Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” ... ⁴¹ So those who welcomed his message were baptized, and that day about three thousand persons were added.

This is the story of Pentecost. The Spirit appears. The church is born. The world is changed. This is the story of Pentecost. This is our story, church! This is the story we remember year after year, each and every Pentecost.

And in any other year, on any other Pentecost, I might have focused on the sound of rushing wind, and the tongues of fire, and the sudden, undeniable presence of the Spirit showing up in a stunning display of otherworldly pyrotechnics. In any other year, on any other Pentecost, I might have focused on the way the Spirit empowered the disciples to preach the gospel in every language, removing any linguistic obstacle from sharing the good news. In any other year, on any other Pentecost, I might have focused on the three thousand people who came to faith after hearing their preaching that day. In any other year, on any other Pentecost, I might have focused on the moment when the Spirit transformed this motley crew of fishermen and tax collectors and fair-weather disciples into apostles who would change the world. In any other year, on any other Pentecost, I might have focused on everything that happens starting in verse 2.

But this isn't any other year, and this isn't any other Pentecost. This year, on this Pentecost, I can't bring myself to move past verse 1. "When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place" (Acts 2:1, NRSV). *They were all together in one place.* In a COVID-touched world, that alone sounds strange and wonderful. *They were all together in one place?* A group of people, gathered in one place? Their county must've moved to "green."

But let's not get so distracted by that part that we overlook the first part of the verse. "When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place" (Acts 2:1, NRSV). *When the day of Pentecost had come.* We forget, we Christian readers, that this is not the story of the "first Pentecost." Long before these events took place, Pentecost was already a thing. Pentecost was already a holiday. Before it was this windy, fiery, Spirit-filled holiday that we've come to know and celebrate, Pentecost was already a holiday for God's people. In the Hebrew, it was called *Shavuot* -- but because it always took place fifty days after Passover, it was known in the more common Greek as *Pentecostos*, Pentecost... literally, "the fiftieth day." It was an ancient celebration, one with roots reaching as far back as the book of Exodus. It was a celebration to mark the end of the grain harvest, a celebration to honor God's goodness in the midst of that harvest, a celebration to give thanks to God for that harvest.

A celebration to give thanks to God for the harvest. It was Thanksgiving, church. They're gathered in Jerusalem for an ancient near eastern version of Thanksgiving. Quick -- somebody grab the turkey booties and pumpkin pie!

They're gathered in Jerusalem -- in part, because it's what they've been told to do. After he was raised from the dead, but before he was taken up into heaven, Jesus told his disciples to remain there, in Jerusalem, to wait there for a promised gift from on high. But they're also gathered in Jerusalem, in part, because that's just what you do on

Pentecost, on Shavuot, on... Thanksgiving, so to speak. You gather in Jerusalem to give thanks for God's goodness, to give thanks for the harvest.

Of course, I don't know what those gathered disciples may have had in mind for their Pentecost-Thanksgiving plans. I don't know how they planned to celebrate, or if they planned to celebrate. I don't know whether they planned to go to the Temple. I don't know whether they set aside special offerings or prepared special foods (though I feel pretty confident in saying they weren't planning to use turkey booties). I don't know what they expected Pentecost-Thanksgiving to look like this time around.

I don't know... but I do wonder. I wonder how it felt. See, Pentecost is a gather-in-Jerusalem festival, one of three annual gather-in-Jerusalem festivals. And the last time God's people gathered in Jerusalem for a festival was... well... Passover. The Passover when things got out of hand. The Passover when Judas led guards to the garden and Temple authorities turned Jesus over to Pilate. The Passover when the Romans nailed Jesus to a brutal cross. *That* Passover. Then, just a few days after that Passover, some of the women of their group went to Jesus' borrowed tomb and came back with the most outlandish story, that he was risen from the dead... something they'd never have believed except for the fact that then Jesus just showed up, right there among them, in the flesh... all of that just a few days after that Passover. That's what happened last time everyone was gathered in Jerusalem, and it turned their world upside down and back again more than once. They've known joy and endured trauma. I wouldn't be surprised if they're not quite ready for another gather-in-Jerusalem festival just yet. But now, after seven weeks, here they are again.

But... here they are again. Back in the place you always go, to do the thing you always do. Back in Jerusalem, gathered in Jerusalem, to give thanks for God's goodness. No matter how many times their world has turned upside down and back again, they're

still here, on the day of thanksgiving. No matter how many times their world has turned upside down and back again, they're still (I think) giving thanks, even as they wait for what God will do next.

In any other year, on any other Pentecost, I might have placed [all my focus on the flashier, more dramatic parts of the story. The rushing wind. The tongues of fire. The passionate preaching. The three thousand converts.](#) In any other year, on any other Pentecost, I might have focused on that. Not this year. Not this Pentecost. Our world has turned upside down and back again more than once. We've known some joy, these past several weeks... but we've also known trauma, too. So what now, on this Pentecost, this year?

On this Pentecost -- a Pentecost like none I've ever experienced -- I'm going to take my cue from the disciples and start where the Pentecost story starts. Even as I wait with faith and expectation for the next big thing God will do (a cure for COVID, maybe? an end to systemic racism? peace in our land? if you're taking suggestions...), I'm going to start by giving thanks. Even as I seek the presence of the Spirit within me, I'm going to start by giving thanks. Even as I try to move forward, navigating a world that has turned upside down and back again more than once, I'm going to start by giving thanks.

Given all that we've seen and experienced over these past three months, "giving thanks" may seem like the last thing you really feel like doing. But friends, because it's Pentecost... in a way, it's Thanksgiving too. (Someone grab the turkey booties! Someone whip up a pumpkin pie!) So on this strange new Pentecost in this strange new world, may we give thanks for what God has already done, no matter what has happened. And on this strange new Pentecost in this strange new world, may we wait eagerly for what the Spirit will do next; there's no telling what will happen.

