

Pentecost C
First Sunday of Pride Month
Genesis 11:1-9
Psalm 104:25-33, 37
Acts 2:1-21
John 14:8-17, 25-27

Title

Come Heavenly Comforter
and Spirit of Truth
Blowing everywhere and filling all things
Treasury of Blessing
and Giver of Life
Come and abide in us
And cleanse us from every impurity
and in your great goodness save us.

These words from this ancient Russian hymn I first heard on Pentecost when I was seminarian at St. Gregory of Nyssa in San Francisco.

St. Gregory of Nyssa Episcopal Church is known as being a little “out there”, a little “fringe-y”, which was precisely one of the reasons I chose to be the seminarian there. I needed someone or a community to blow apart my understanding of what it meant to be an Episcopalian.

On Pentecost, one of two occasions that the community of St. Gregory puts on a huge parade with drums and bells and incense and umbrellas

and everyone is deck out in red and orange and yellow and they parade around the Portrero Hill neighborhood of San Francisco.

This was not so much the little parades we do around the church parking lot and back into the building.

We paraded down the hill and across the street, stopping traffic, finding our way to the corner of a playground where we then stopped and someone through an old fashioned megaphone — like the ones cheerleaders use — proclaimed a reading from Scripture.

Then with drums banging and cymbals crashing we paraded around another corner to the back of a loading dock. There, we sang hymns to God and then continued back around with more smoke and more bells and more drums, proclaiming the Good News of Jesus Christ to this community who truly does not know.

Now, this parade, this protest, this celebration of life as it *should* be, truly stretched the boundaries of my comfort zone. And, in fact, much of the time that I was at St. Gregory I lived on this border between what was truly comfortable and familiar and — *I thought* — life-giving, and this place of slight but sustainable discomfort: where things weren't quite exactly as I knew them; I didn't really know what was going to happen, I didn't feel as though I could anticipate what would be next.

In all of that, I developed this sense of being comfortable in discomfort.

This is precisely where we, as privileged people in this world, need to be to work for social justice in the world — which is, in fact, our call as Christians.

As yet another set of mass shootings and more gun violence and political and personal violence against our LGBTQ+ siblings continue to make the news, there is a part of me that is ready to get up and do something and to tell them why they need to change their opinion or their policies — and then I realize: I live in Massachusetts. I live the Boston Metro Area. And, I am an Episcopalian.

And for better and worse, people who fit into that bubble are, for the most part, already there. I am preaching to the choir, more often than not.

So, what do we do?

Because what is also in the news is this theme of being sick and tired of thoughts and prayers. If all you have to offer are your thoughts and prayers, please stop.

But as Christians, that is precisely what we offer, our prayers. Particularly when there is nothing concrete that we feel that we can do. The one thing we can always do is pray.

And, thoughts and prayers — our faith — without action, is dead. So what do we do?

We start where we are. We do what we can where we are with what we have. And when we have done that, we expand. We bring the Good News of God's love to others in our family, who maybe don't think the way we do. And when we've done that, we bring it friends, who maybe don't think the way we do. And then neighbors — who are the people who live next door to us, across the street, across the town, and maybe halfway across the country. And we begin to chip away at the change that needs to be made.

And that takes finding a comfort in living in discomfort.

At yesterday's diaconal ordinations in this diocese, Bishop Alan charged those of us present, in person and online, and the newly ordained with these words by Carolyn Winfrey Gillette who, with her husband is the co-pastor of Overbrook Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia, PA:

If we just talk of thoughts and prayers
And don't live out a faith that dares,
And don't take on the ways of death,
Our thoughts and prayers are fleeting breath.¹

The text then goes on to remind us that change requires more than dreaming of what could be; it requires taking actual action to build holy, beloved community — the kind of community which will require us to

¹ Carolyn Winfrey Gillette, If We Just Talk of Thoughts and Prayers. http://www.carolynshymns.com/if_we_just_talk_of_thoughts_and_prayers.html

change how we think about and participate in community in order to truly understand the pain in need of healing and the hope for which we work.

The final stanza of the hymn goes like this,

God, may our prayers and dreams and songs
Lead to a faith that takes on wrongs —
That works for peace and justice, too.
Then will our prayers bring joy to you.²

In this season after Pentecost, I pray that you find that place of comfort in discomfort in your life; that you take a risk for someone else in spreading the Good News of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Come Heavenly Comforter and Spirit of Truth
Blowing everywhere and filling all things
Treasury of Blessing and Giver of Life
Come and abide in us—of every age, of every gender, of every orientation.
Cleanse us from the chaotic churning in our hearts and souls,
and give us your new language of love; save us.

Amen.

The Rev. Lauren Sayre Lukason
June 5, 2022
Christ Episcopal Church, Needham, MA (with Livestream)

² *Ibid.*