



Grace Lutheran Church, State College, PA

Rev. Carolyn K. Hetrick

The Day of Pentecost: June 9, 2019

Sermon Title: “Beautiful Together”

Sermon Text: Romans 8:14-17

Last week Pastor Schul encouraged us to see that baptism is not just a box we check off of a “to-do” list.

Today we celebrate Pentecost and the gift of the Holy Spirit to God’s people. I brought with me a different kind of box to illustrate the work of the Holy Spirit.



I am sure it’s obvious how this box illustrates the Holy Spirit, right? No? Well, box like this had an important role in my life. It showed up because God told someone to send it to me. When I was finishing seminary, I knew that I would need a red pastor stole to wear when I was ordained. Just like Pentecost is a time to think of the work of the Holy Spirit, so too when someone is set aside and called to be a pastor in the church. Because only through the Holy Spirit at work in us is this possible. And last week was the anniversary of Pastor Schul’s 8th ordination anniversary. We celebrate in the Spirit with you.

I wanted my stole to be unique, and handmade, and found a fabric artist in British Columbia, Canada through the power of the Holy Spirit in the internet. She creates stoles from old ties and scarves and scraps of fabric and our vision of what we want it to look like. I knew I needed about 50 ties in red and orange and yellow and white. Good flame and smoke and dove colors. And I also knew that I wanted that stole to reflect baptism, for it is in baptism that each of us receives the Spirit. So I needed about 20 blue ties.

I asked friends, family, co-workers if they could give a tie or scarf to be used, perhaps one they no longer needed. People sort of scratched their heads at how this could all turn out to be something other than a hot mess. As I tried to explain that this was going to reflect the movement of the Spirit and I would wave my arms like I do. I think they thought I was kind of nuts. This included the people at the post office who said, why on earth are you sending a box of ties across the border to Canada? What's really in that box?

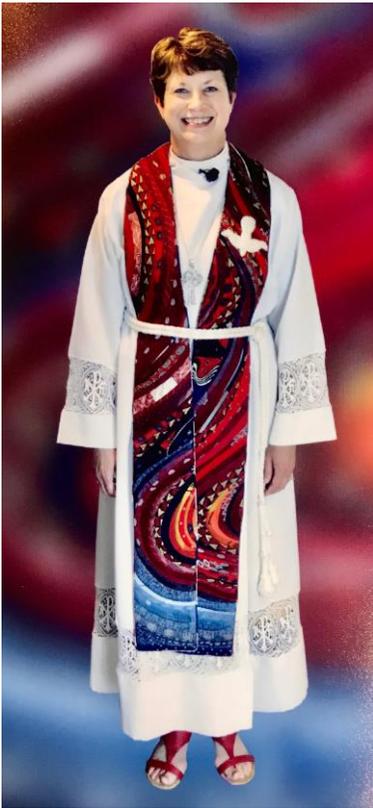
As I gathered everything, I noticed that everyone remembered hearing Holy Spirit, flames, wind, smoke, and dove. But no one remembered baptism. I was worried and wondered what I could do because time was of the essence. Then one day a box showed up on my front door step. Not delivered by the postman and not from UPS or FedEx. I was a little concerned but decided to open it. It was like opening that gag gift where the can has the springy snakes. This gaggle of neckties sprung out with a note that made it all clear.

Thirty blue neckties.

I'd asked my internship congregation to be a part of this crazy "ties becoming a stole" thing too. One older gentleman heard that and "baptism" and filled a box with blue ties. From a long time ago. Wide ties you don't see unless you watch reruns of The Brady Bunch. The note said, "My mother always told me that I would find answers to my problems at church. For three years I didn't know what to do with the ties I had removed from the tie rack. Your request solved my problem...God's blessings upon your ministry."

On the one hand, this man could check off a box- get rid of ties. But I think even more was the idea that these ties of his were "perfectly good" ties. They ought to have a purpose. Yes, life changes but what about these ties? I think it's that way with people too. Though I only knew him for less than a year, somehow we had become part of something much larger that the Spirit creates and uses in our lives.

Today you see me wearing the final result that I can assure you no one but a Spirit guided artist envisioned.



Whenever I wear this stole, I remember every person who helped me along the way. Everyone who gave every piece of this stole. Everyone who wrote a prayer on the back including a younger Scott Schul. It feels like wearing God's family embracing me. I remember our conversations and wisdom, and laughter and tears and prayers. And some days, you know when you have "that day," I just need to look at this and remember how God takes things that don't seem to go together, or it's not obvious how they fit and makes a family. It's beautiful.

Crazy red stole or not, this is our life in the Spirit.

We have been created and gifted uniquely. And there really truly is a place for each of us in God's world, even when what that looks like may change at different times, and even when we may feel like "What about me?" No matter who you are, no matter how life moves on, God infused that Spirit into us and it continues to be stirred. From the time we have been claimed in our baptism. Paul writes about the Holy Spirit as a Spirit of adoption. In one sense of course this is about knowing that we are adopted in to God's family- given a place at God's table and in God's house forever. But a deeper reading says the Spirit witnesses with us to this life.

This gets at our capacity to remember. That we are given the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord, the Spirit of joy in God's presence. Words we speak in baptism and words our confirmands will hear this today as we lay hands on them and call upon God to stir up in them this Spirit they already possess.

That Spirit is in each of us, and we share a home where we promise to dwell together, even in crazy, scratch your head moments.

This is not just an experience gained through objective data, or milepost moments in a scrapbook. It is gained by an ongoing encounter to gain that "feels like family" comfort. Where we get so used to God's grace at work, we can believe that gentleman's mother was right- you can find the answer to all your troubles at church like this:

**Here, we can experience the "I can tell you anything" comfort,
the "I know you will love me anyway" comfort.**

The "I know you will help me figure out what to do now" comfort.

The "pray for me" comfort.

Here and in the kingdom among fellow believers, God wants us to be at home with God and each other.

To tend this relationship and remember this is the grace place.

So, be willing to open the boxes God places before you.

And come home often- to be loved, and healed. To be encouraged and fed. To celebrate and cry.

And to sometimes remember that it is possible that we are wrong, but we are given grace, not cut off.

I admit it's kind of crazy that God gathers such a diverse group and tells us we're family.

But I pray that Spirit in us will be continually stirred and that we can dedicate ourselves to pausing the pace of our fast moving and ever changing lives, to see just how beautiful we are as God's people together. Amen