

**The Contemplative Tradition:
Another Way of Experiencing Pentecost**

Numbers 11:24-30; Acts 2:1-21; John 7:37-39

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Pentecost Sunday

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With Dr. Jennie Robinson

What is the meaning of Pentecost in churches like Weatherly? We're not a dance-in-the-isles kind of church, right? I've never heard anyone exercise the gift of tongues or heal the sick in our church. Dr. Molly Marshall was right a few years ago when she told us that most Baptists are afraid of the Spirit. We're afraid the Spirit will make us do something "weird," she said. We prefer order over ardor, one of my other professors used to said.

And yet we've got Acts 2, where the Holy Spirit fell upon the early followers of Jesus. We've got the teachings of Jesus about the Holy Spirit, whom he called our Advocate. Even in the Old Testament, the Spirit is a living, dynamic presence.

I want us to reclaim Pentecost and befriend the Holy Spirit. I'm convinced that Weatherly-type churches can experience the Holy Spirit in a meaningful, personal way. And, no, it's not weird. Some of you are familiar with the Contemplative Tradition. It is alive and well in the Catholic Church and many mainline Protestant churches. The Contemplative Tradition is a prayer-filled, Spirit-focused approach to faith. I've said before that Weatherly is a *doing* church. We build houses, teach internationals, work with children and youth, and other things like that. We are more into doing than we are into being. The Contemplative Tradition is into being. The Quaker writer, Richard Foster, identifies four strengths of this tradition.

First, he says that this tradition "constantly fans the flames of our 'first love.'" Love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, Jesus said. That is the first and great commandment. And that is the focus of the Contemplative Tradition—simple love of God. But don't let the simplicity fool you. Maintaining that "first love" demands constant vigilance.

The second strength of this tradition is that it forces us beyond cerebral religion. Many of us get stuck up here with ideas and theories about God and faith. This tradition seeks to experience the God who defies ideas, who is beyond theories. It is an attempt to experience the Unknowable One.

The third strength is the emphasis on prayer. It doesn't just say that prayer is a good thing or an important thing; it says that prayer is the essential thing.

And finally, the Contemplative Tradition emphasizes the solitariness of our life with God. While life in community is good and something we're all missing right now, there are limits to the role of community. We must develop a "personal history with God," Foster says. (*Streams of Living Water*, pp. 51-52)

So, if you're not a dance-in-the-isles kind of person, that's okay. That is not the only way to experience the Holy Spirit. Try the Contemplative Tradition and see if it adds a new dimension to your Pentecost.

Dr. Jennie Robinson is my neighbor. I know she is fit because I see her walking our streets just about every day. Most of you know that Dr. Robinson is on Huntsville's City Council, representing District 3. She is past president of the council. You may not know that she is Board Secretary and Foundation Administrator for a non-profit foundation called ELM, which stands for Expect Little Miracles. ELM works to reverse cycles of poverty. Since its founding in 2012, ELM has awarded more than a million dollars in grants. Jennie joins us from Texas this morning where she is visiting her mother.

Jennie, welcome to Weatherly. This pandemic has been difficult for us all. As a city leader, I know you have been very busy. How are you doing?

Jennie, tell us more about the work of ELM and why you started it.

I know you belong to the The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints. What is the role of the Holy Spirit in your tradition?

Is the Contemplative Tradition practiced in your tradition?

Jennie, thank you for joining us today. I know you're in Texas to visit your mother. Thank her for sharing you with us! Have a safe trip home.

Pentecost is the day we celebrate the Spirit, and we don't have to fear anything. So I invite you to reclaim Pentecost and befriend the Holy Spirit. Try the Contemplative Tradition. It is another way of experiencing Pentecost.

Closing Prayer

Spirit of the Living God, fall fresh on each of us. Melt us. Mold us. Fill us.
Spirit of the Living God, fall fresh on us. Amen.