

Come, Holy Spirit, come

By [Rachael Keefe](#)

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Many years ago I was the interim pastor at a small church and was free to celebrate Pentecost without regard to that congregation's tradition. We decided that it would be confirmation day for the small group of youth who had been going to classes and they wanted red balloons among other things. This was long before I knew anything about latex allergies so red balloons it was. They were tied in bunches all over the sanctuary and there were red streamers galore. It was a day of joy to be sure.

Until a balloon escaped and wrapped itself around a ceiling fan. For all I know that balloon is still there. While the trustees were not amused because accessing those high ceiling fans was problematic, I found it very funny. These balloons were symbols of the Spirit, the Spirit we think we have tamed. The one rogue balloon reminded me that we have not tamed the Holy Spirit and we still cannot predict where she will go and she is very likely to present us with quite a bit of challenge.

As I contemplate Pentecost this year, I am surrounded by the beauty of Holy Wisdom Monastery in Wisconsin. I've come here to work on a book about my experience with suicide—part memoir, part theological reflection, and part clinical response. Beginning to write this book has provided me opportunity to look back at my life differently than I ever have before. I can see where the Spirit was moving even when I thought I was completely alone.

This is true for my personal story as well as my professional one. As I was walking through the rain-soaked woods yesterday morning, listening to all the bird calls, sliding on the mud and wet grass, it occurred to me that the church has no idea what power it holds. We have built beautiful buildings that are now crippling many congregations. We have created dogma and doctrine and rules of membership that keep people away. We have forgotten that we are stewards of creation, agents of grace, bearers of hope.

We think the Spirit is with us when we feel good. We choose not to remember the unsettling capacity of the Spirit to discomfort the comfortable and lead us to places

we would not go on our own. The Spirit still calls as surely as those early-morning birds I heard. I'm not sure we are listening to her very well.

We worry about how to get millennials into our congregations. We think if we have someone who can bring in young people and their families, all will be well. In the meantime, we've forgotten the power of the God we worship. We have long-neglected the flames of passion for fear of not being politically correct. We are reluctant to claim Christ as our path to God, a path that requires unbridled, unconditional love for ourselves, our neighbors, creation and Creator. Why would young people want to join a church where the flight of the Spirit is disrupted by ceiling fans and traditions more often than she's allowed to move where she wills?

While walking through wet woods and prairie on my way to a small lake, I noticed deer, rabbit, and fox tracks. I heard the call of a wide variety of birds and the sound of yesterday's rain dripping off the newly leafed branches. Violets, purple and white, are scattered everywhere. Other early wildflowers bring patches of yellow, white, and purple to the grassy path I walked. The sense of aliveness in this place awakens something in me. It's been a long time since I've awoken to the sound of the woods in the morning. I yearn to breathe in this life, to be a part of the wildness that lies just below the surface.

This is what worship should do, this is what church should be. When we gather to worship God, there should be evidence of a barely contained wildness. A wildness that beckons to all, inviting all to stop a while and breathe deeply this breath of life that will change, challenge, and empower us.

As we celebrate Pentecost this year, may we experience the wildness of the Spirit that set those early heads on fire. May her winds blow through our lives and our churches to clear a path for passion. May her touch set our hearts aflame and connect us with the wildness that lies just below the surface. As a birthday gift to the church, wouldn't it be great to set her free?

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