

For a lot of folks in the church — at least in the Episcopal Church — I’d wager Pentecost sits pretty low on the league table of personally impactful feast days. People might make a special effort to come to church on Christmas or Easter, but the same can’t really be said in the Episcopal Church for Pentecost.

And I’ve always been curious about that.

The church year seems to reach its climax at Easter and then, weeks later, Pentecost can feel a bit like a last hurrah before we cross over into... not very much at all.

I’ve been in plenty of parishes that jokingly call the season after Pentecost “the doldrums.” We’re just sort of adrift until we pick up our beloved story again at Advent.

For nearly half the year we follow Jesus’ story: from his birth, through his ministry, to his suffering, death, and resurrection. There’s a clear thread to follow. But after Easter, after the great joy of the resurrection, the story-telling seems to fizzle out. We get story snippets rather than a continuous narrative. Jesus appears unexpectedly — on a road, beside a lake, in locked rooms. Sometimes he’s recognized, sometimes he isn’t. He appears and disappears.

Between Easter and Ascension it’s actually quite hard to follow exactly what’s going on in Scripture. These fifty days of Easter are very different from the story-led months that came before.

And we can miss that, we can miss the narrative. We humans love our stories. We’ve told stories since the beginning.

Stories are how we make meaning in our lives.

Stories help us understand who we are and what matters. Stories have the power to set our hearts and minds on fire, to make us think deeply, sometimes differently, about what kind of life we want to live, who we want to be, what kind of world we long for.

Stories can transform the way we see ourselves and each other. Stories help us imagine that another way of living is always possible.

And so perhaps this is why the church spends nearly half of every year telling the great story of Jesus. Year after year, we hear the same story. Not because we're duty-bound to repeat it, but because it's through this story that we make sense of the ever-changing and relentless flow of facts, events, and information in our lives.

The Christian story helps us organize and prioritize what we do with the stuff of life.

Our own story is still being worked out. What comes next for us is uncertain. But the story to which we bind ourselves offers us a way to follow, a way to organize and make sense of it all.

Our Christian story wraps around us, it's a resource to draw from, a point of attachment. It is the fabric of our lives.

And so, when we seemingly get to the 'end' of the story at Easter, we can feel a bit lost – after the resurrection, we can feel like we've gotten to the end of the thread. It's tricky to know where to look, what to hold onto.

The Easter season has no thread, really, instead we're immersed in the baffling truth of the resurrection, trying to make some sense of who Jesus is and what this means for us and for the world.

The story making has passed, really, now, into our own lives. We're no longer tracking with a clear story unfolding each Sunday in front of us, we're now following the thread within us.

We enter a season of response, of considering what the story means, discerning the impact it's had on us – it's a season we wrestle with the story, struggle with the story, try to make sense of the story.

And then Pentecost slams into our lives.

We hear this wild next part of the narrative, the Spirit descending upon the disciples: a violent wind rushing through the place where they are, flames appearing, tongues of fire resting on ordinary people and anointing them, filling them with power to live out their stories as the body of Christ in the world.

The Spirit of God saying emphatically that the story is no longer simply playing out in front of them, for them. The story is now happening within them, they are now the story.

At Pentecost the disciples move from being bewildered followers of Jesus, not quite sure what it all means, grappling to keep hold of the thread of meaning, they go from this to being confident, Spirit-filled apostles — ordinary people now extraordinarily entrusted with carrying the story forward, with becoming the next chapter of it.

They become the story.

And we celebrate Pentecost because we, too, every year, at this point in the narrative, we, too, become the story.

Were the disciples ready for that day? Ready to take that on? Maybe.

Are we ready for that?

Maybe this is why Pentecost feels so different from Christmas or Easter. Because Pentecost shifts the story-telling onto us — it says we are how the story continues, our lives are to pick up the thread.

Each generation is called on to add its own lived response to our great, shared story. Each generation is to offer its own wisdoms, its own responses for the next generation that'll follow.

Now it's our turn.

The season after Pentecost absolutely isn't 'the doldrums.'

The season after Pentecost is an extraordinary and necessary time for us to embody the story, for us to weave the threads of our lives from and back into the story of Jesus.

And so the rhythm of parish life changes. It slows down. It makes space for reflection, for discernment, for growth, for the story to come together in us.

How will the truth of God in Christ come alive in our story this year?

What does Jesus' story ask of us? What does it make possible for us — at this point in our story, today?

What does the coming of the Spirit mean for the life that lies ahead of us this Pentecost?

What will we do with what we've learned, felt, and experienced?

Do we have the courage to risk? To trust God more deeply? To be transformed more completely?

The story we follow each year, and the story we are part of is a story of life, of life that's complicated and messy and really hard to understand sometimes. It's a story that binds us to God and to one another, that helps us understand suffering and possibility, it's a story that gives us hope. It's a story of love.

At that first Pentecost, tongues of flames rested on those first apostles so that the fire of the Holy Spirit might burn within each of us – so let's tell the story, live the story, and relish this marvelous season.

This is the season for our great, shared story to be told by our lives, so let's live it fully as ones on fire in the Spirit!