

May 19/20 Reflection by Julie Tilghman

Twenty years ago, in the spring of 1998, I was preparing to graduate from college. Like many seniors, I felt unsure about what path to take next. I had majored in psych and Spanish—subjects that applied to everything and nothing. I knew I wanted to do post-graduate volunteer work, but had no clear vision of how that might take shape. I applied for a few programs, and was accepted to a teaching program at Notre Dame called the Alliance for Catholic Education (often called “ACE”). In the midst of my discernment, I met with Father Lou Delfra, an associate director of the ACE program. I told him that I wasn’t sure I wanted to teach, because I didn’t know whether I would be good at it. He said, “Julie, we won’t let you **not** do this because you don’t think you will be good at it.” (To this day, Father Lou—who had been an English major—insists that he did not use a triple negative.) Anyway, ignoring his terrible grammar, I took his words to heart, and proceeded to spend two years of my life teaching at Holy Family High School, an all-African-American school in Birmingham, Alabama. I went there to “teach,” but wow—did I get an education!

At our opening faculty retreat, we went to a facility in Hunstville, Alabama, a rural town outside of Birmingham. On the first evening, when our staff arrived at the dining hall for dinner, we were informed that they were overbooked, and we would need to dine in their “executive dining hall.” We were a little confused. We followed the camp host through the kitchen, to the pantry, where they had squeezed a table between the shelves of canned food. I sat there, shocked. Here I was, a naïve 22 year-old, amidst a group of older black women—many of whom had lived through the Civil Rights Movement. I was stunned, humbled and

saddened. I didn't know what to say or do, so I just listened. I heard their stories of sitting at different lunch counters, of drinking from separate fountains, of entering through the back door of various establishments. And—in that moment—being asked to eat in the pantry, while all the white folk sat in the dining room. Needless to say, I got more of an education in that 45 minutes than I gave in my entire 2 years at Holy Family.

Today, almost exactly 20 years later, I still find myself teaching—and learning. My life has an educator led me to Boston, and then to a fulfilling career under a different dome—at Holy Names Academy. I took with me so many of the lessons I learned during my time in Birmingham, and try to embody a life committed to peace, justice and equal rights for all. I am grateful every day for the Pentecostal Moment offered to me by Father Lou. In essence, he was the voice of Jesus saying “Peace be with you,” helping me to shed my fear, and sending me forth, just as the disciples were sent, to share the Gospel message.

If we look closely at today's Gospel, we see two distinct movements. First, Jesus appears to the disciples and says “Peace be with you.” The disciples were gathered in the upper room, and they were terrified. They knew that they needed to go out and spread the Gospel message, but they were in the midst of unknown circumstances. And in just four words, Jesus offers them the reassurance that they need... that we all need... in the midst of these Pentecostal moments. “Peace be with you.”

However, Jesus does not only wish them peace; he also sends them forth: “As the Father has sent me, so I send you.” And the Holy Spirit—in the form of wind and fire--lights a divine

spark in each of them. They go out and speak in different tongues, reaching audiences far and wide.

When I look at our world today, and witness all the injustices of our society, I can't help but recognize these times as another Pentecostal moment. Over the past few years, I—like many of you—have found myself in the midst of moments of both desolation and consolation. I often wonder if I can make any dent in the enormous issues facing the people of our time. And I find comfort in today's readings, where Jesus reminds us that we are called to find peace within ourselves, especially in these turbulent times. But that is not enough. We all must also find the courage to venture out into the struggle, channeling the different kinds of spiritual gifts and building up the body of Christ.

For some, that might mean addressing racial injustices—the school to prison pipeline, the tragic deaths of black and brown bodies at the hands of police. For others, it might mean advocating for immigrants and refugees, or protesting the wars that are the root of our current refugee crisis. For others, it might mean feeding the hungry or housing the homeless. For others, it might mean protecting the lives of the unborn or protesting our country's lack of gun control. For others, it means working for environmental justice. For many of us—myself included—it means trying to raise conscientious children who will bring kindness and love into our hurting world.

Each year at Holy Names, we have a peace and justice theme. In light of today's readings, I would like to close by sharing with you next year's theme—a quote from Maya Angelou. "Nothing can dim the light that shines from within."

God has gifted each one of us with a unique divine light, and calls us to respond in this Pentecostal moment. So, this week, let each of us consider: how Jesus is sending me forth? Sending us forth? How might I find peace in my life, so that I can face the challenges of our time? It takes work and courage, but I truly believe that we were made for these times... for this Pentecostal moment.