



**A Sermon preached in Christ Church, Grosse Pointe, Michigan  
by The Right Reverend Dr. Bonnie A. Perry, Bishop of Michigan**

**The Day of Pentecost (Year A)  
28 May 2023**

*Come, Holy Spirit, and enkindle within us the fire  
of your burning love. In your blessed Name, we pray.*

I am just delighted to be here with all of you and to be able to share in a number of baptisms. So, yay. So there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind that filled the entire house and divided tongues as a fire appeared among them. And all of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and they began to speak in other languages as the Spirit gave them the ability.

Well, that's pretty extraordinary. I, for one, lead a little bit more of an ordinary life. So for a person like me, and perhaps like you, what might motivate our sense of God, our sense of the holy, our ability to experience God's extraordinary presence in our ordinary lives? How do we have that profound encounter with God if we haven't had any tongues of fire blowing through our houses lately? Ages 8 to 12, I lived in Hawaii and my dad is a retired lieutenant colonel in the Marine Corps and we were stationed there. And it has to have been my most very favorite place that I lived as a child. And it certainly shaped and formed me. And hats off to Drew. I know that that is his home and I know how special it is to him, and I'm a teeny bit envious about that.

My first moment of transcendence came late one summer evening on Waimea Bay. Now, some of you may know of Waimea Bay. It's an iconic beach on the north shore of the island of Oahu. And in the winter when the swell is right, it can have some of the most amazing and challenging surf in the world. And this past January, whoa, it was amazing. When I'm avoiding writing my sermons, I watched big waves surfing

This year's epic. But the day I remember, I was about 10 years old, and it was the summer, and it was dead flat, which sometimes happens in the summer. And we had been out snorkeling, and it was my family's pattern on Sundays to go to mass at eight in the morning and then pack, it was a while ago, pack the rambler station wagon and go to two different beaches that my brother Kevin and I had picked out.



And I remember on that day, everyone else had actually gone back to shore, but I decided to stay out and the sun was going down, and it left a trail of gold on the face of the water. And I decided to turn my boogie board right into the sun and to start paddling on that gold path as far as I could. And what I remember is being filled with awe, feeling as if I were following a path to God. And I remember the liquid gold reflecting on the blue water as my hands passed through when I was really kind of suffused with a sense of peace and strength and amazement at the incredible beauty of this vast, gorgeous world. Now, I imagine my mother on the beach watching may have had other senses, but I paddled for about 10 or 15 minutes on that path before I turned my board around and went safely back to shore. But that sense of transcendent awe has stayed with me.

Now, some of you may know that I'm a sea kayaker. I love paddling sea kayaks, and I also professionally guide sea kayaking trips. I train instructors and I coach at various sea kayaking symposiums and venues around the world in my spare time in cool places like Baja, in Scotland, and New Zealand and Canada, and right here in Michigan in our own inland sea. And it is something of a passion for me. And I must admit that the closest that I come to encountering that transcendence that I experienced as a child in Hawaii is when I'm in my sea kayak paddling, perhaps amidst the cliffs and the caves and the scaries and the stacks and the tiny islands off of Shetland, off of Scotland, or on Lake Superior or Lake Michigan, particularly when that beautifully clear aqua marine water that we have in our inland sea that nobody on the coast knows that we have.

And it passes over the sandstone boulders, or maybe when I'm paddling along the amazing Pictured Rocks off Lake Superior in the upper peninsula, that's when I have a sense of awe. That feeling of just being suffused with awe and wonder and amazement. And that is one part, one leg of my experience of God in the ordinary. Another part, a feeling connected to God, is when I have a sense of agency, when I have a sense of my ability to act, to use the gifts that God has given me to get something done, to make a difference.

Or, if we were to continue my sea kayak theme, to gracefully move my boat in dynamic waters, dodging waves and cliffs and reveling and paddling fast enough to catch a wave and to experience the raw power and energy of God. And that raw power brings me to a third experience of holy acceptance. For me, finding God that is experiencing the extraordinary and the ordinary is a combination of awe, agency, and acceptance. Those moments in my life when I realize that much of what goes on in the world is not up to me, not dependent upon me, and not in the slightest bit controlled by me. A key aspect of spirituality for me is not fooling myself into thinking I'm in control.

In a boat, in a human powered 22 inch wide, 16-foot-long sea kayak, water will out. That is water is the boss, the flow, the power, the force, the direction I do well to make use of it and study it and



respect it and have an idea of where it's flowing from, how fast it's going and what's causing it to move. But in the end, I cannot control it. And friends, much of life is like that, so little we can control. And regardless of our station in the world, the money we have, the education we've attained, we're ultimately not in control of our destinies. So to in a sea kayak, if a title stream around the Isle of Skye on the west coast of Scotland is moving at seven knots, and I can only paddle three or four knots, then I do best not trying to fight it, but rather to work with it, to alter my course or design my crossings and my trips to work with the power rather than against the power of the water.

Finding God, encountering God in the ordinary for me often consists of those three parts, awe, the ability to be completely aware of the amazing world in which we live, to see and to know, and to even immerse myself in my surroundings, reveling maybe in the trail of gold, the setting sun leaves on the sea, or the drop-dead gorgeous morning we have right now. Agency, continually discovering, honing, and honoring and developing the gifts that God has given me to make a difference, to perhaps move my sea kayak through tempestuous sea or to make our way through the daily vagaries of the comings and goings of our lives, making good and gracious use of the gifts and skills that God has given you, given us.

And lastly, that acceptance, acceptance of that which we cannot change or alter, to know how and where the water's moving and to use force rather than to fight the flow. Awe, agency, acceptance, three possible ways to see God acting in our world, ordinary ways to be open to encountering God's extraordinary presence in our lives. Amen.