The Pentecost experience -- with images of wind, Spirit, being filled with the Spirit or breath of life -- is reminiscent of creation. We recall from Genesis when the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters and when God breathed into Adam's nostrils to give him life.

Now, at the Pentecost experience in Acts, we see the Spirit re-creating. We see the start of a new day when God's work is for the whole world -- not just a chosen people known as the Israelites. We see all who are filled with the Spirit (and that's all of us) become children of God. In what appears to be a sudden entrance of the Holy Spirit, we see the power for the people of God to unite into a church and go out to tell the world about the love of God.

This momentous event – the coming of the Holy Spirit – was world-changing. However, we also see from the language used about the Holy Spirit throughout Scripture that the Spirit is constantly making subtle changes in the world, in us, and in the Church. The psalm refers to that – to the constancy of the Holy Spirit – in small renewals of creation throughout time. We learn from all the descriptions we have of the Spirit that the Spirit is with us and guides us in ordinary everyday life. We also learn that at specific points in time, the Spirit breaks through in miraculous ways. In creation language, the psalm describes how the Spirit changes the world through a slow evolution. In Acts, we see how it changes the world with a Big Bang.

Our own experience of the Holy Spirit probably is like this as well. Sometimes the Spirit gently nudges us to do something God has called us to. Other times, it seems to slap us into rapt attention and change.

I don't believe God brings bad things on us. Sometimes, however, God lets negative or difficult things unfold based upon natural law and is with us to comfort us and lead us during those times. Sometimes God even works in those difficult times to urge us to make significant changes. For example, we have just experienced and are still experiencing a pandemic that is worse than anything most of us have experienced in our lives. God didn't send the pandemic.

Yet, God's Spirit is creating something new out of that pandemic. In the original Pentecost experience, God brought incredible power to what was to become Christ's Church to go out and minister. God the Spirit very dramatically gave them the power to think about God in new ways. God the Spirit is giving God's Church the power now to go out and minister to this new world, post-pandemic. And God is calling us to think about how to do that in new ways.

Phyllis Tickle, a church historian, was famous for saying that every 500 years or so, the Church is compelled to do some house cleaning and have a giant rummage sale. Suppose we look at the pandemic as giving us – the Church—the opportunity to look around to see what practices we have that no longer work, find a way to dispose of those practices, and then to pick up the new practices that God through His constant re-creation is calling us to. Or perhaps -- as the Church we've become complacent, and the Spirit is using the pandemic to shake us up out of our comfort zone – to urge us to look again at what more we could be doing for the Gospel.

Mary Oliver is one of my favorite poets. She has written a poem titled "The Summer Day." While her poem talks about us as individuals, I believe it also speaks to us as a church. Listen as I read it for how it speaks to what the Spirit calls the Church to dream about and commit to do now.

**Who made the world?
Who made the swan, and the black bear?
Who made the grasshopper?
This grasshopper, I mean-
the one who has flung herself out of the grass,
the one who is eating sugar out of my hand,
who is moving her jaws back and forth instead of up and down-
who is gazing around with her enormous and complicated eyes.
Now she lifts her pale forearms and thoroughly washes her face.
Now she snaps her wings open, and floats away.
I don't know exactly what a prayer is.
I do know how to pay attention, how to fall down
into the grass, how to kneel in the grass,
how to be idle and blessed, how to stroll through the fields,
which is what I have been doing all day.
Tell me, what else should I have done?
Doesn't everything die at last, and too soon?
Tell me, what is it you plan to do
With your one wild and precious life?[[1]](#endnote-1)**

OK, Church. We've strolled with God through the fields. We've been blessed. We've done much good. But now we've come to a crossroads. The pandemic has forced that big rummage sale, and it's time to re-envision what God wants us to be. The Spirit wants to pour down upon us and re-create us for a new time.

Tell me, Church. In light of all that has happened and is happening in God's world now, what is it you plan to do with your one wild and precious life?

1. Mary Oliver – The Summer Day, published in *House of Light* (Beacon Press, 1990) [↑](#endnote-ref-1)