

**SERMON- Pentecost (A) 10 AM only**

**Charles R. Cowherd**

Numbers 11:24-30

Psalms 104:25-35, 37

**St. Timothy's (Herndon)**

**May 24, 2026**

Acts 2:1-21

John 20:19-23

## **OPENING:**

There is A LOT going on this morning if you could not tell already.

Today is the Day of Pentecost—

the birthday of the church, the day that the disciples received the Holy Spirit.

Today, there is a Baptism at this service—

Eleanor Walker Joyce— Peter and Sarah's daughter,

Kerrie and Rick Wilson's grandchild.

Today is my wife and I's wedding anniversary.

12 years. Linen is the gift item.

And Today was the day that we went back to Rite I at 8 AM.

## **WILSON**

Two points of personal privilege this morning.

1<sup>st</sup>: This is, by my reckoning, the 4<sup>th</sup> generation of the Wilson family that will receive a sacrament at St. Timothy's Episcopal Church, Herndon, Virginia

I had the honor of officiating Rick's mother Dorothy's funeral a couple years back.

Kerrie and Rick were married here 40 years ago at the end of this month.

Jen and Sarah were confirmed here.

Now Eleanor is to be baptized.

What an amazing lineage!

But I will warn you, that Sandy Schanné's great granddaughter is ready to be baptized as well, which would put the Hutchison/ Hoybach clan at FIVE generations.

2<sup>nd</sup>: If you are counting up the Sacraments and Sacramental Rites that I *personally* have administered with this family:

I have done Eucharist, of course. Married Chris and Allie, soon to be baptizing Eleanor, did last rites for Dorothy. And presented Rick to the Bishop for Reception into the Episcopal Church.

All that leaves is Confession/ Absolution, which I could take here publicly, and ordination, I am looking at you Caleb, in a few years, or Kerrie, I know you have just retired.

I am not, by the way, going to give this same sermon that I gave at the 8 o'clock which was a learned exposition on the differences between Rite I and Rite II.

They got a special sermon today as they are back in Rite I.

## **RITE I vs RITE II**

But do notice on the front cover we have a part of the Baptismal service from the 1928 Prayer Book (≈ Rite I) which we will, this morning, compare with the one that starts on page 6 from the “new” Prayer Book 1979.

The “thesis statement” for the Book of Common Prayer 1979 can be found on page 13, the red book near you somewhere:

“The Holy Eucharist, the principal act of Christian worship on the Lord's Day and other major Feasts... as set forth in this Book, are the regular services appointed for public worship in the Church.”

That idea, that we are to do Communion every Sunday AND, secondly, that Baptism is linked to Holy Eucharist and thus should NOT be celebrated at home with private Baptism, but rather on Sundays and in the Church.

That's the Theology of the Book of Common Prayer.

When the church gathers, it celebrates with the Body and Blood, Bread and Wine, and when someone joins, that happens at that service.

I was born and baptized an Episcopalian, but that's three years of seminary right there, you have a good start there Caleb and Kerrie.

That was the thesis statement intended by the authors and the Church learned it, through a lot of pain and hardship, that's our practice.

The other thesis statement—which I can almost guarantee was not intended as such—is in the Baptismal Service, top of page 8, page 305 of the BCP, you don't need to turn to it because, like any good thesis statement, you have learned it over these last 47 years:

“Will you strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being?” The answer “I will, with God's help.”

The BCP was written by a committee, but I wonder who wrote that line, because that is the one, of everything in the new book, that has stuck for our church. Of course, the author(s) did not come up with that line *ex nihilo*, out of the ether. That line, which is really itself from the Bible, has become the de facto “primer”, the Gospel in miniature, our tagline as a denomination.

## **BAPTISMAL THEOLOGY**

I didn't have space for the entire 1928 version but you can see if you read the front page that it's VERY different.

The first difference first is the gendered language, it was the Swingin' 70's but all you could get was the masculine italics, and the antiquated Elizabeth language.

More importantly, in the old Prayer Book there is a focus on belief and on doctrine, on passing down the Commandments and the Articles of the Faith as contained in the Creed to the next generation. To get baptized, either you or your Godparents need to have that knowledge and that faith.

In the new prayer book, there is instead a focus on action and on practice. There is a focus on our shared responsibility, the response "by God's help" becomes "with God's help." There is more of an emphasis on the community, on how one's faith is practiced as a group by way of love, and less on one's own salvation as it relates to sin.

## **SHIFT**

That's a lot. Now, before I get in trouble here, I am not saying one is wrong, or one is better. Baptism by water in the 3-fold name of the Trinity is valid, full stop. But I would get in trouble with the Bishop if I were to go back to the old way.

In the "you cannot make this stuff up" category. Kent and Diane Miller, as you know are moving to North Carolina, and they were cleaning up their house and they dropped off a version of the **1893** Prayer Book for me and for you all.

So think about how much ink has been spilled on all the revisions, if you want to learn it all, go to Seminary.

Sorry to bore you Eleanor with dates—but the authors of the 1979 BCP saw their revision as a return to the theology of the 1549 Prayer Book and could be traced all the way back to the practice of the Early Church.

Here is a little synopsis of when I asked folks about which Rite people like.

One parishioner responded by telling a story about her 4<sup>th</sup> grade teacher at St.

Agnes Episcopal School in Alexandria, VA who oversaw her and the other pupils from the balcony in the chapel where they sang in the choir and did worship. At one point, the teacher remonstrated our story-teller, saying "use the prayer book; Men died for it; honor them."<sup>1</sup> 'Tis true.

Kerrie Wilson: *I always lean into the tradition - I think it was a result of moving around every two years and the Rite I certainly has that formality. I love Morning Prayer service that was done in some of the parishes we attended over the years. That said - I'm all for keeping things unified and simple (copying, etc.) - especially*

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<sup>1</sup> Belinda Collins email 5/19/2026

*if we are down staff. What's great is this prompted me to really think about it and go through the services.*

So, on the one hand, the Prayer Book is indeed a treasure.

On the other hand, we should not make an idol about the particular way that you want to worship. ... and we should not pretend that the book is God incarnate in paper and ink.

One lesson from that is that God is always up to something surprising, something different, even when it's something "old."

Revelation: "Behold, I make all things new."

Ephesians: "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and tomorrow."

Ultimately it's a BOTH-AND type of thing.

There is beauty and irony of having this conversation on this the Day of Pentecost, me celebrating this most venerable of St. Tim's families and me concentrating on this archaic (!) language from this ancient rite of initiation by water.

Today, we hear Old Testament and New Testament lessons emphasizing this idea that God is not constrained by the limits of language, by tribe, by ethnicity, by geography. We hear in this astonishing scene of fire and wind and bewilderment that human barriers cannot be placed on the living God who speaks to us in many tongues, and who does not limit the ability to prophesy to a chosen few.

We learn that that the Holy Spirit, famously, "blows where it will."

BUT, and you should have been waiting for the BUT.

We are not Pentecostals—who rely primarily on the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

As a denomination, we have three pillars- Scripture, Tradition, and Reason.

And tradition plays a big part in that three-legged stool.

As does the role of the community.

This should all sound familiar or at least ring true to you.

If not, Welcome to Anglicanism, welcome to being an Episcopalian!

BOTH-AND.

**AMEN**