

**Sunday, May 24, 2015**  
**Rev. Diane Monti-Catania**

**Sermon – "Balloons Belong in Church!"**

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Oh my goodness. What is going on here?

Dancing bones.

Heads on fire.

Babbling preachers.

Drums in church.

Balloons in a sanctuary.

This is not our ordinary church.

This is not what we expect.

We are an orderly group.

We assemble for worship, sit quietly in our pews, listen to the readings, voice our silent prayers, think deeply about the sermon message and go home with a blessing.

We are mind worshippers – more than heart worshippers.

We think about things more than we feel things.

This is not a bad thing – it is simply how we are most comfortable.

It works for us.

So...what would it be like if a strong wind came blowing through our meetinghouse accompanied by thunderous noise and all of a sudden our heads appeared to be on fire?

Do you think you would move out of your pew?

Oh my friends, God created us to be complex human beings, with hearts full of love and lives full of joy and laughter.

God created us – from the dry dusty bones of our ancestors in Ezekiel's field – to sing praise, to live lives that glorify God.

We often remind ourselves that we have been created in God's image – I like to imagine that God is most clearly reflected in me when I am smiling, caring, reaching out to another person.

The crowds gathered on that first Pentecost thought that the disciples must be drunk.

What other excuse could there be for a group of poor people to be so happy?

On the day that God sent the Holy Spirit to Jerusalem hearts, as well as heads, caught fire.

The Good News of Jesus Christ was heard by all the people – regardless of race, gender, country of origin or social status.

The words of the prophet Joel rang true as God's spirit was poured out upon all flesh.

Our theme for today's service, *Balloons Belong in Church*, comes from a poem by Ann Weems. Ann Weems is an elder in the Presbyterian church, a popular lecturer and poet. Today's poem – though a bit long – captures everything I want you to know about Pentecost, the Holy Spirit in our lives, and what church ought to be.

## BALLOONS BELONG IN CHURCH

by Ann Weems

I took to church one morning a happy four-year-old boy

Holding a bright blue string to which was attached

his much loved orange balloon with pink stripes...

Certainly a thing of beauty

And if not forever, at least a joy for a very important now.

When later he met me at the door

Clutching blue string, orange and pink bobbing behind him,

He didn't have to tell me something had gone wrong.

"What's the matter?"

He wouldn't tell me.

"I bet they loved your balloon..."

Out it came, then -- mocking the teacher's voice, "We don't bring balloons to church."

Then that little four-year old, his lip a little trembly, asked:

"Why aren't balloons allowed in church?"

I thought God would like balloons."

I celebrate balloons, parades and chocolate chip cookies.

I celebrate seashells and elephants and lions that roar.

I celebrate roasted marshmallows and chocolate cake and fresh fish.

I celebrate aromas: bread baking, mincemeat, lemons...

I celebrate seeing: bright colors, wheat in a field, tiny wild flowers...

I celebrate hearing: waves pounding, the rain's rhythm, soft voices...

I celebrate touching: toes in the sand, a kitten's soft fur, another person...

I celebrate the sun that shines slab dab in our faces...

I celebrate the crashing thunder and the brazen lightning...

And I celebrate the green of the world...the life-giving green...the hope-giving green...  
I celebrate birth: the wonder...the miracle...of that tiny life already asserting its selfhood.  
I celebrate children  
who laugh out loud  
who walk in the mud and dawdle in the puddles  
who put chocolate fingers anywhere  
who like to be tickled  
who scribble in church  
who whisper in loud voices  
who sing in louder voices  
who run...and laugh when they fall  
who cry at the top of their lungs  
who cover themselves with bandaids  
who squeeze the toothpaste all over the bathroom  
who slurp their soup  
who chew coughdrops  
who ask questions  
who give us sticky, paste-covered creations  
who want their picture taken  
who won't use their napkins  
who bury goldfish, sleep with the dog, scream at their best friend  
who hug us in a hurry and rush outside without their hats.  
I celebrate children  
who are so busy living they don't have time for our hangups  
And I celebrate adults who are as little children.  
I celebrate the person who breaks up the meaningless routines of life.

The person who stops to reflect, to question, to doubt.  
-- The person who isn't afraid to feel...  
The person who refuses to play the game.  
I celebrate anger at injustice  
I celebrate tears for the mistreated, the hurt, the lonely...  
I celebrate the community that cares... the church...  
I celebrate the church.  
I celebrate the times when we in the church made it..  
When we answered a cry  
When we held to our warm and well-fed bodies a lonely world.  
I celebrate the times when we let God get through to our hiding places  
Through our maze of meetings  
Our pleasant facade...deep down to our selfhood  
Deep down to where we really are.  
Call it heart, soul, naked self  
It's where we hide  
Deep down away from God  
And away from each other.  
I celebrate the times when the church is the Church  
When we are Christians  
When we are living, loving, contributing God's children...  
I celebrate that God calls us 'God's children' even when we are in hiding.  
I celebrate love...the moments when the You is more important than the I  
I celebrate the perfect love...the cross...the Christ  
loving in spite of...  
giving without reward

I celebrate the music within a person that must be heard  
I celebrate life...that we may live more abundantly...  
Where did we get the idea that balloons don't belong in the church?  
Where did we get the idea that God loves gray and Sh-h-h-h-h  
And drab and anything will do?  
I think it's blasphemy not to appreciate the joy in God's world.  
I think it's blasphemy not to bring our joy into God's church.  
For God so loved the world  
That He hung there  
Loving the unlovable  
What beautiful gift cannot be offered unto the Lord?  
Whether it's a balloon or a song or some joy that sits within you waiting to have the lid taken off.  
The Scriptures say there's a time to laugh and a time to weep.  
It's not hard to see the reasons for crying in a world where hatred for one another is so manifest.  
So celebrate!  
Bring your balloons and your butterflies, your bouquets of flowers...  
Bring the torches and hold them high!  
Dance your dances, paint your feelings, sing your songs, whistle, laugh.  
Life is a celebration, an affirmation of God's love.  
Life is distributing more balloons.  
For God so loved the world...  
Surely that's a cause for Joy.  
Surely we should celebrate!  
Good News! That He should love us that much.  
Where did we ever get the idea that balloons don't belong in the church?