

Message Sunday 31st May 2020 :50th Word: "Spirit"

Reading : Acts 2:1-21

On this the Birthday of the Church the Spirit in me greets the Spirit in You !

GOD HAS GREAT TIMING! The day God chose to send the Holy Spirit Jerusalem was chock full of visitors , mostly celebrating the Jewish festival called 'The Feast of Weeks'. It was originally an agricultural festival celebrated 50 days after Passover, gradually , as things in life evolve, changes occurred and the focus shifted more to celebrating the sacred history of the Hebrew people , the escape from EGYPT , the giving of the law to MOSES on Mount Sinai, a great day for a renewal of covenant , a commitment to God, and in this case an amazing outpouring of God's great love, in an absolutely astounding way! The disciples had been waiting for something to happen and I think after the fact they must have gathered together and shook their heads in amazement and wonder...and said "WOW"

Today, we celebrate Pentecost which is considered the birthday of the church , the coming of the Holy Spirit who came as wind and fire moving among the disciples and breathing new life into them , removing their fears and anxiety , empowering them in a new way and stirring them into action.

At present we gather a little differently as ' church'. I wonder if this new way of 'doing and being' church can stir us into action ,as it offers the opportunity to live out our faith in new ways? Perhaps it will in more ways than we could ever imagine.

When the day of Pentecost had come, the followers of Jesus were all together in one place. And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting.

As they encountered the Spirit, they sprung into action, and apparently were immediately on the move, out on the street sharing a message of love, welcome, and peace, all in the name of the crucified and risen Jesus.

They shared it in a way that all nationalities present, heard it clearly in their own language. Imagine these humble followers of Jesus speaking clearly in many different tongues. The ignorant ones in the crowd who didn't 'get' that these followers of Jesus were actually speaking coherently to all present, accused them of being drunk, showing only their own ignorance. Peter reminded them it was only 9 o'clock in the morning .

No, this was not intoxication by drink, this was intoxication of another kind they were HIGH on the newly acquired indwelling Spirit of God!

At one church some people were asked to share their personal faith stories of Pentecost. One woman, a professional dancer ,talked about being baptized at the church. She couldn't remember the day herself, yet felt that she knew the details intimately as each Pentecost Sunday her Dad would tell her the story of the how the Holy Spirit was alive in the church the day she was Baptized.

As a young child she would look around the sanctuary and would wonder.

"Where is the Holy Spirit Is it on the cross, is it on the altar, or in the stain glass windows?". She could never figure it out.

In later years after leaving the hospital after the tragic death of her parents she found herself driving to the church that she loved.

She walked into the sanctuary and sat down...sobbing and crying out to God.

Just then Edith walked in, she had been making pies in the kitchen and heard someone come in the door. Edith took off her apron and quietly sat beside her. This is when the woman knew where the Holy Spirit resided.

The church isn't the buildings. The church is made up of diverse personalities ordinary people just like Edith. Edith and those faithful individuals who embody the Spirit of God..... without saying a word!

God's breath is the source of our breath as well. Breath and Spirit are so related both in the Greek and Hebrew languages.

Yet in this Pandemic we have become aware that being physically close and breathing the air together in tight places can be dangerous.

There are several ministerial blogs on line and the following words are written by a woman named Joanna, and in light of the happenings in Minneapolis I wanted to share Joanna's words with you, she writes:

"We're all thinking a lot about our breath these days. About whether we're breathing in COVID-19 virus particles—or, God forbid, unknowingly breathing them out. About where we breathe and how we breathe and whether we should cover our breath with a mask. We're (thinking about who is breathing in the space around us and about the potential danger of our singing breath. And in the midst of this pandemic that threatens our ability to breathe and makes our breath threatening, we hear the heart-breaking cry of George Floyd: "I can't breathe." We heard these words, of course, and also in July of 2014 from Eric Garner as he, like Floyd, was being murdered by a police officer(I had to look up this U.S. e.g. (I remembered it vaguely. Eric Garner was arrested for supposedly selling single cigarettes on the street, a charge he vehemently denied to the arresting officers, but one of them put him, and held him in a choke hold during which he also was heard to say he couldn't breathe ! He was 43 and suffered from Asthma).Joana continues : But somehow, in this time when the world is staggered by a virus that can steal our breath, this cry sounds even more horrifying: "I can't breathe."

We are all encouraged to stay home when we can, and wear masks in public as a way to help each other stay healthy—to help each other keep breathing.(I found the last paragraph particularly jarring)

But even simpler than staying home, even easier and less inconvenient than wearing a mask, is the directive to not press your knee into someone's throat until they can't breathe. It really shouldn't 'be so hard for us to not kill each other.So, too, are people of colour more likely to have their breath stopped by police.

Breath, these days, for some feels like a luxury. A dangerous privilege.

Joanna goes on to talk about the brutal reality in the States of racism, of economic disparities, job inequities and unequal access to health care access)And of the high percentage of people of colour arrested over white people.

I don't think we can rest easy and point the finger only at the U.S.,In Canada we have some messes of our own to clean up, especially in the unsolved missing and murdered indigenous Women and Children, just to mention one.

The Spirit of God blows where it will and may it blow on us to open our hearts, eyes and ears to the injustice in this world and inspire us to stand up and be counted.

As we read about the wind—the breath—of the Holy Spirit rushing through the earliest believers, we remember again that God's breath is the source of our breath as well.

So may we use every breath in our body in life-giving ways, to speak truth to power, to offer hope, to work toward a world where everyone can breathe freely.

We might think that our world will never be the same again.....but who knows.....in many ways.....it might be better.....let it be so... Amen