

Pentecost Sunday, yr. a, 5/31/2020

Psalm 104:24-35; 1 Corinthians 12¹-13; John 20:19-23; Acts 2:1-21

Out From Behind Closed Doors – Rev. Dr. Deborah M. Jenks

Scripture readings are from The Message: In Contemporary Language; Eugene Peterson)

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On this Pentecost Sunday, as we celebrate the gift of God's Holy Spirit in Jesus Christ to us, I invite us to take a kind of reflective journey together through the scriptures. Take time together to prayerfully open our hearts and minds and souls to where and how the Holy Spirit of God is leading us as a community of faith, how the Holy Spirit of God is calling us to be community in this time of pandemic, violence, and division.

(Take a Moment for Silent Centering)

Psalm 104:24-34, 35b (Peterson)

READER: HUNT GRESSITT

What a wildly, wonderful world, God!
In wisdom You made it all,
made earth overflow with your wonderful creation...

All the creatures look expectantly to you
to give them their food on time.
You come, and they gather around,
you open your hand and they eat from it.
If you turned your back,
They'd die in a minute –
Take back your Spirit, and they die,
return to dust.
Send out your Spirit and they spring to life –
the whole countryside in bloom and blossom.

The glory of God – let it last forever!
May God rejoice in all God's creation!
O let me sing to God all my life long,
sing praise to God as long as I have being!
May my meditation be pleasing to God, for I rejoice in God!

TIME OF SILENCE

Why didn't things – why couldn't things – stay beautiful? Stay as perfectly beautiful as God saw it all and called it good? It would be wonderful if we human beings could hold onto that glimpse of heaven on earth we see in the beauty of the earth – if we could hold our hearts open to the breath of life that is God's Holy Spirit in us and in all that lives and moves and has being in this world, we would never be lost. We would be saved, loved. It would be wonderful ... but we don't seem able to stay there for long. Why?

As soon as we evoke praise, conjure up visions of God in heaven and everything right with the world, as soon as we rest in God's blessings, as soon as our hearts are open, they become vulnerable. And shadows appear, and hearts close in fear. And another kind of spirit is evoked as ... FEAR

People suffer and die with a virus that runs rampant among us. A black man is killed by a white man for all to see, and another is threatened. People use themselves their own lives as weapons of destruction. Jobs – our neighbors, ours -are lost, and saving them depends on setting one against another, responding to fear and insecurity, and consuming more and more. We find ourselves having doubts and questions. We're hurt by those we love, and we hurt others. People we love and cherish suffer. They die. And a spirit of perpetual retaliation and blaming, and fear takes hold. We find ourselves alone, isolated, bereft, hearts locked away for fear.

John 20:19-23

READER: BILL MACDOWELL

(After Jesus had been crucified, dead, and buried, after Jesus appeared risen from the dead to Mary Magdalene and then she had told the other disciples) later that evening, the disciples gathered together behind locked doors for fear. Jesus entered, stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." Then he showed them the wounds in his hands and his side. Seeing him with their own eyes, they rejoiced. Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father sent me, so I send you."

Then he took a deep breath and breathed into them, “Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; those whose sins you don’t forgive are retained, and what are you going to do with them?”

TIME OF SILENCE

Wrapped up in ourselves, blinded by our own unfulfilled expectations, dreams, feelings of failure, hearts hardened and closed up from hurt and helplessness, possessed by fears in the face of violence and pandemic – we hide behind locked doors, unable to reach out, to see and touch and hold others. And Jesus comes to us through our locked doors, bearing his own wounds of suffering and death, and says, “Peace be with you.”

Jesus – crucified and risen – comes into our midst saying, “Peace be with you” He gives himself to the disciples, to us, wounds and all, and forgives. He doesn’t criticize or judge the disciples, or us, for our fears and unfaithfulness. He doesn’t condemn those who ever denied him. He doesn’t make anyone feel guilty. He doesn’t pick and choose who is worthy and who is not. It’s as if Jesus reaches back to that first moment before history – that moment of Adam and Eve – that moment of questioning, doubt, fear, when refusal of God began and hearts began to harden, that moment when sin separated and divided; and Jesus embraced that moment and breathed new life, eternal life, new beginning.

“Peace be with you. As the Father sent me, so I send you.” Then he breathed on them and said, “Those whose sins you forgive, are forgiven; those whose sins you hold onto are held.”

1 Corinthians 12:1-13 READER: RUTH MILLER

(Paul writes to a church confused, divided where some think or are thought to be more gifted than others, and all are divided, in conflict and disagreement over how to follow in God’s way.)

What I want to talk about now is the various ways God’s Spirit gets worked into our lives. ... God’s various gifts are handed out everywhere, but they all originate in God’s Spirit. God’s various ministries are carried out everywhere, but they all

originate in God's Spirit. God's various expressions of power are in action everywhere, but God is behind it all. Each person is given something to do that shows who God is. Everyone gets in on it, everyone benefits. All kinds of gifts are handed out by the Spirit, and to all kinds of people, for the good of all! The variety is wonderful: Wise counsel, clear understanding, simple trust, healing the sick, miraculous acts, proclamation, distinguishing between spirits, tongues, interpretation of tongues.

All these are activated by one and the same Spirit, who decides who gets what when. For just as the body in one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. By means of his one Spirit, we all said goodbye to our partial and piecemeal lives. We each used to independently call our own shots, but then we entered into a large and integrated life in which Christ has the final say in everything. (This is what we proclaimed in word and action when we were baptized.) Each of us is now a part of Christ's resurrection body, refreshed and sustained at one fountain – his Spirit – where we all come to drink.

TIME OF SILENCE

With the gift of the Holy Spirit – the breath of Christ in us – we are changed, made new; transformed from frightened, scattered, confused individuals into a community of love – united in the Spirit by covenant into the Body of Christ sent by God as God sent God's Son Jesus so that others – the world – may see the face of God, feel God's healing touch, know the saving grace and forgiveness of God, and be filled with new and eternal life of God's Spirit.

People will know Jesus, be filled with God's life-giving Spirit, by the way we live and love one another in community, as church as the Body of Christ.

Take a moment now to hold yourself, your heart, your gift and passion, that flame of God's Holy Spirit that is in you before God.

(HOLD YOUR LIGHTED CANDLE IN FRONT OF YOU.)

Acts 2: READER: DAVID JOLLY

When the Feast of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Without warning there was a sound like a strong wind from heaven. It filled the whole place. Then, like a wild fire, the Holy Spirit spread through their ranks, and they started speaking in different languages as the Spirit prompted them.

There were many devout pilgrims from all over the world. When they heard the sound they came on the run. When they heard their own languages being spoken, they were thunderstruck ... and kept saying ... "They're speaking our languages, describing God's mighty works!" ...

And Peter stood up with the others and spoke out with urgency: ... This is what the prophet Joel announced would happen when he said:

In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on every kind of people: Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, and you old men dream dreams. Even upon my servants, both men and women, in those days I will pour out my Spirit; ... Amen.