

The Rev. Emily Dunevant

May 31, 2020
Pentecost Sunday

John 10:19-23
Acts 2:1-21
Psalm 104:24-34, 35b
1 Cor. 12:3b-13

I don't often title my sermons. In fact, I never do. But, if I had to give this one a title I would call it, "The Holy Spirit and the Ethics of Uncertainty." It's a hefty title but one that I think can serve us well this week.

We might think of it this way...when Jesus breathes upon us, how does it change our hearts? How does the Holy Spirit once received through that breath change our actions? Because in times of uncertainty, this breathe of holiness is critical if we are to discern how God wants us to live with a spirit of peace and justice and mercy.

In a week where the act of breathing has become a call to justice, I want us to pause and consider how the breath of the Holy Spirit can be for us and for our communities a transformative witness to God's love in a complicated, uncertain world.

But, first, take a moment to breathe. Breathe in and breathe out. Let your breath fill your lungs with life. Now, imagine the Holy Spirit moving in and through you with goodness and love. That breath, that Spirit is your gift of life. Take a moment and gives thanks for your well-being.

Now, I want us to consider the ability we have to breathe because we have adequate health care. I want us to consider the ability we have to breathe because we aren't discriminated against and we can walk down the street without fear of violence. I want us to consider our ability to breathe because someone took the time to check in on us and make sure we are doing OK.

Because to breathe is to know life. To breathe is to know safety. To breathe is to feel love and gratitude.

And this week, breath was uncertain. The breath we have all been granted by God; the breath that Jesus breathed upon his disciples and upon each and every one of us; the breath that allowed the people on Pentecost to hear and know one another across their differences; the breath that was given to all of humanity, not just a lucky few; the breath that was poured out in the form of gifts bound together by a single loving Spirit. That breath that we all deserve has become uncertain for far too many and for far too long.

Maybe you feel that uncertainty...in your own life, in the lives of your loved ones, in your communities. As you see people die because there aren't enough medical supplies or hospital beds to effectively treat the virus. As you see people die because of the color of their skin. As you see riots and fear and division roll through your news feed hour after hour.

I am reminded in our reading from Acts, that breath is not a commodity. It is not a privilege. It is God's loving gift to all people... no matter who you are, the color of your skin, the amount of money in your bank account, or the side of town you live on. God breathed and gave the Holy Spirit to every single one of you. That should be a certainty. Our charge as Christians is to make it a reality.

I am also reminded in 1 Corinthians that when that breath, that same Spirit was given to each and every one of us, it was given in the form of a gift with a very specific purpose. 1 Corinthians reads, *"Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good."* Your gift of Spirit is a certainty. Our charge as Christians is to make it a reality.

So when we speak of an ethic of uncertainty, I mean this...there are going to be difficult and demanding times ahead of us. There are going to be times that we will feel helpless and we won't know how to make a difference. There are going to be times when our faith is challenged and our courage is weakened. That's the uncertainty. And when we push up against those times, we will be called to make a choice, to take a stand, to create a better way.

And I want you to know that the Good News is this...the Holy Spirit has already paved the way forward. The breath for us has been breathed. The Spirit has descended. It is now our job to acknowledge our uncertainty and allow the Holy Spirit to guide us to a better place, a more compassionate community, a more just society, a more merciful world. And God needs you take your gifts and make this kind of abundant breath a reality.

What will you choose to do when given the opportunity to make a difference?

Uncertainty will always provide us with a crossroads. It will provide us with an opportunity to choose between right and wrong, justice and lawlessness, mercy and cruelty. It will provide rich and meaningful opportunities to pray and search your heart for God's guidance and love. It will engage your doubts. It will build confidence in your gifts. It will help you discern how God may be calling you to act in these difficult times.

This isn't easy work. These aren't easy times. But the Holy Spirit remains.

I want to leave you with this prayer written by John Dear, a longtime activist, author, and clergy person who has worked as the coordinator of chaplains for the Red Cross and has advocated for peace around the world especially in times of war. He was recently nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize by Archbishop Desmond Tutu. This is his prayer...

Let us pray.

"Come, Holy Spirit, send your driving wind upon us and blow away the cobwebs in our hearts and minds and give us the fresh air of the breath of Jesus.

"Come, Holy Spirit, send your blazing fire upon us so that we may burn with love and compassion for each other and love every human being everywhere.

"Come, Holy Spirit, give us new tongues to speak the good news of peace, justice and nonviolence to a world of war, injustice and violence.

"Come, Holy Spirit, send us into the streets, into the world, to share the love of God with one another, to talk about the nonviolent Jesus, to denounce the evil spirits of violence, greed, war, injustice, empire and death. And then to proclaim Jesus' reign of love, mercy, disarmament, justice, nonviolence and reconciliation.

"Come, Holy Spirit, fill us with the joy of Christ, so that no matter what we're going through, no matter our problems, we may always live in you.

"Come, Holy Spirit, make us instruments of your peace. Help us to carry on the Acts of the Apostles. Make us heralds of a new world without war, poverty, nuclear weapons or global warming, a new world of love, nonviolence, justice and peace."

Amen.