

Pentecost is one of my absolute favorite days out of the church year. Not only because we are surrounded by all of this fabulous Badger red (On Wisconsin), but because we get to spend this whole day intentionally celebrating the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit, the holy wind and breath of God that has empowered all of creation from the very beginning. The Holy Spirit, the Advocate promised to us by Jesus Christ in his last days on Earth. The Holy Spirit, the beautiful and comforting and challenging holy presence who calls us in every time and place, who is the very breath that keeps us alive as God's good creation.

But I have to admit, this year doesn't quite feel like the celebration that we often expect on Pentecost. There's a lot going on in our world that is not celebratory and is in fact much closer to lament. We are grieving in so very many ways these days - all the ways we grieve our lives pre-covid 19 pandemic. All the ways we are hurting due to distancing measures, cancelled plans and milestones and other celebrations. And most powerfully these days, we grieve the death of George Floyd, and we hurt deeply for our neighbors in Minneapolis and St. Paul.

Coping with the death of George Floyd, and all other people needlessly and violently killed is an enormous weight on our hearts and minds and spirits. It is deeply painful to see video of the breath of life being forcibly removed from a beloved brother in Christ. And it hurts on so many levels to see our neighbors without justice, as victims of violence. As we begin to cope with this tragedy, and the ongoing hurt of the whole situation, we must lean on the power of prayer within ourselves and for our community.

I cannot shake the connection between these two major tragedies that we are coping with in our community these days and the Holy Spirit today on Pentecost.

What were the words that George repeated as he was killed? I can't breathe. What are some of the major symptoms associated with covid-19? Shortness of breath and disruptions of breath with coughing.

And many of you who have been in conversation with me or in Confirmation classes with me will know the deep connection I'm about to mention. What is the best way I know how to talk about the Holy Spirit? She is our breath of life. The very breath of God that animated Adam and brought the very first humans alive from the dust. Our breath is the life force that makes us know we are living. Our breath is always present, keeping us alive, and it is through focusing on our breathing that we can always powerfully center ourselves in moments of stress and panic. Breathing in, breathing out. I am here. I am alive. I am a beloved child of God.

The ancient word for spirit in both Hebrew (ruach) and Greek (pneuma) means breath, wind, and spirit, all in equal measure. Our forebears in faith considered these things to be intimately connected as the words were the same. The breath of life that God gives us is the same wind of creation in God's whole world, is the same Holy Spirit who is activated in every single one of us.

These tragedies and the Holy Spirit are connected by breath. Both covid-19 and the death of George Floyd force us to consider not having breath. That the loss and absence of breath is what causes us to die. And the idea of not having this breath of life, the Spirit within us, is scary. It is not until we are faced with the possibility of our breath being taken away that we begin to take things seriously. It is tragic that a man, our neighbor, and so many other brothers and sisters and siblings in Christ have had to die in order for many of us to recognize the systems that oppress our fellow humans. And it is absolutely tragic that over 100,000 Americans have died from covid-19.

As Christian people we are called to, above all else, love God and love our neighbors. We love God in many, many ways with spiritual practices, worship, prayer, and all the other things that keep us close to God and our spirits connected to Christ. And we are called to love our neighbors in many, many ways too.

Our 1 Corinthians text today highlights all the different spiritual gifts that are given to all people. We have gifts of wisdom, healing, languages, and prophecy, just to name a few. And each of us has unique spiritual gifts that are woven in their very beings as God created them from the very beginning. Our spiritual gifts are found when we feel the most alive. When we feel our breathing change - calm or excited. When we feel our bodies humming differently - different heartbeats and energy and focus and joy. When we don't realize how much time has passed because we're too focused on living in the world around us. When we are able to freely provide for our neighbors in our own unique ways - healing, wisdom, languages, perseverance, generosity, curiosity, kindness, and faithfulness are just a few that I see so often in all of you, Mt. Zion.

So, truly, how can we love our neighbors best? By doing what we can to keep them alive. By using our gifts to keep them alive.

We need one another. The old saying goes that "it takes a village", and we need a village of people regardless of what age or stage we are at. We need our fellow humans. We need support and action from the people around us and our own actions for other people in order to keep one another alive. We need the uniqueness that we find in the people who are different from us. We need the perspectives and insights and feelings and connection of one another in order to live truly, to live abundantly as Jesus promises us. It is by and through the uniqueness of our fellow siblings in Christ that we grow into the fullness of life - we learn, we live, and we love as God calls us to in these greatest commandments.

And though sometimes it takes the extra effort to love people who are different from us, it is absolutely worth it to be in relationship with a range of people, people who look differently, love differently, come from different backgrounds, and have different abilities than we do. Every single one of us is loved by God and worthy of the love of our brothers and sisters in

Christ. This uniqueness in each of our brothers and sisters does not mean we get to judge one another for being different. We must be curious, honest, and kind. Above all else, we must be kind and loving to one another. We will not overcome the tragedies of our time by dwelling in differences. We will only be stronger together, as one common humanity, one body of Christ together called to bring love into this world.

Every single person around us is created in the same way we were. Every single person is loved deeply by God and we are deeply called to love them too. Every single person, no matter what, has the same right to live and breathe and be human. Every single person has spiritual gifts and a unique makeup of how they work and function and process. And this uniqueness, this set of gifts that the Holy Spirit has blessed each of us with is given by the breath and love of God.

Each of us, in our own unique way, is blessed with gifts of the Holy Spirit, woven into us by God and empowered by the Holy Spirit. By the Spirit's work in the world our gifts are able to be activated. And especially today, Pentecost, we are given a powerful reminder of how the Holy Spirit works in our world.

And that powerful reminder doesn't always have to be celebration. Nor does it always have to come from tragedy or conflict. The powerful reminders of the Spirit come from being in relationship with one another. Being in relationship with God, listening to the deep calling and empowerment that God puts on our hearts. And being in relationship with our neighbors. In our Acts text today, we heard that people of every kind, every place in that area were joined together by the power of the Holy Spirit. That not even language or cultural barriers would separate these people from receiving the gift of the Spirit. And that kind of calling, to all people no matter the barrier, is what will change our world for the better and bring the reign of God even closer.

So my dear sisters, brothers, siblings in Christ, I pray that we will find ways to be in relationship with one another. I pray that we will see that we have so much more in common than we do in difference. I pray for each and every one of you, that we may be safe, healthy, breathing deeply, deeply loved, and living into our spiritual gifts.

By the power of the Holy Spirit, ever present in our world, these prayers will be heard. And that is always cause for celebration. Thanks be to God.
Amen.