

**5-31-2020 SERMON CCI John 7:32-39 Spring Up, O Well Rev. Robert Reid**

The day of Pentecost has arrived! It's the day the church celebrates the gift of the **Holy Breath** that has come upon all who believe—especially when they gather together. And, yes, I said Holy Breath because that is what the word *pneumatōs*, usually translated Spirit, means. Breath—breathe. Something that for most of our lives we take for granted and for the last four months has become the nonstop focus of all of our attention—making sure that we don't *breathe* on others, or that they don't *breathe* on us.

But, right now, that's what I want us to do. I want us to “conspire” to breath—*together*. Did you know that the word *conspire* means to “breathe together”? So, I dare you *conspire* to breathe. Take a breath right now. Hold it. Now blow it out again. There! You have just launched a *conspiracy* into the world. And the word “spirit”—*CONSPIRĒ* is in there too, right. Do you hear it? To *conspire* is to be filled with the same *spirit*, to be enlivened by the same *wind*. And that was what the story of Pentecost brings to us, not just in the Bible, but today. Even as we worship apart in a time when taking a *breath* or exhaling a *breath* seems to be such a dangerous thing to do!

If you are watching this time of worship while social distancing, our breathing together can be a shared *virtual* experience rather than a *physical* one. Either way, breathing can become a symbol of sharing the holy breathing that is our worship of God together. And as you breathe, the Spirit of God knits us together as one. As Barbara Brown Taylor says, “When we let our breath be shared like this, let it be the presence of God's Holy breath come among us, it can do a lot of things. It can scare us or comfort us, confuse us or clarify things for us, but as far as I can tell,” she says, “the Holy Spirit never bullies us. SO, we are always free to choose whether or how we will respond.”<sup>1</sup>

What is this gift of the Holy Breath of God, the Holy Spirit? It's a Promise from God of **Access**, of **Hope**, of **Support**, and **Power**. Today's text taps into these promises that we who believe, ***we who trust God***, will be transformed like well-water turned into a living spring that will flow from us. And not just flow, but become a river of living water flowing out to refresh and transform our world. That's the promise of this Pentecost text. Now, lots of people have actually done things to transform the world. You can name some of them. But us? You and me?

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<sup>1</sup> Barbara Brown Taylor, *Home by Another Way*. Boston: Cowley Publications, 1999; pp. 142-148.

Really? Are we people destined to make that kind of difference in the world with our lives?

If that gives you pause, then we may want to ask, “Jesus. What are you talking about?” To get it, we need to first get what our Gospel writer John means when he says it hadn’t been possible before this since “there was no Spirit because Jesus was not yet glorified.”

Hard as it is to imagine, the Bible depicts the gift of the Holy Spirit as something that changed the rules for what it meant to be the people of God. When the Hebrew scriptures talked about the Holy Spirit it was not a presence made available to the individual believer. It may have been the presence of God that hovered over the waters at the beginning of creation, but the overall teaching of the OT is that the Spirit was a presence that, for people, only came upon prophets, priests, judges, and kings—not people like you and me.

So when John steps outside the story he is telling to explain what Jesus meant by promising what would flow out of people’s hearts, he says that this promise of living water from God didn’t happen until after Jesus was glorified. The Spirit of God didn’t make Access, Hope, Support, and personal Power available to regular people before Pentecost.

- Any **Access** they had to understand God’s ways and God’s promises was controlled by the promise of being children of Abraham, legal heirs to his last will and testament. They were in the will which meant they were taken care of, *but not in a personal way*. Just in the will.
- Any **Hope** they had was because they were his heirs. That’s why John the Baptist challenged the religionist in his day who dismissed his baptism as unnecessary. He preached that God could turn rocks into children of Abraham if all it took to believe was to be named in the will.
- Nor did they have the promise of **Personal Support** in presenting their case before God. What they had was animal sacrifices. And crop sacrifices. But little hope that their lives could be transformed, that they had the **Power** to make a difference in their world. Only the prophets, priests, judges and kings could make that kind of difference in the name of God.

That’s what John wanted believers to understand when he said “there was no Spirit yet” —no Holy breath breathed into the life of individual believers—**yet**.

So, Tah-dah! The day of Pentecost happened. The Spirit of God flooded into that room where regular people were and filled them with the power and presence of God. God *conspired* to make **Access, Hope, Support, and Power** available to people like you and me. So why do we struggle? Struggle with our belief that **Prayer** makes any difference? Struggle believing our lives really Matter? That the weight of our sin is about the last thing we would ever want to **Confess** to God? That we we have any **Power** to make a difference? Do you ever feel like celebrating Pentecost Sunday is a bit like attending the Pinocchio Motivational Speaker seminar in that Geico Insurance commercial? Pinocchio is in front of people who paid to hear secrets of success. And he begins,

“I look around this room and I see nothing but untapped potential.” {He points to a smiling attendee.} You have potential! {His wooden nose grows and he is a little surprised but keeps on, pointing to another} You have potential! {His nose really grows a whole lot longer} “Oh... boy!” {He moans as everyone realizes that none of what he said was true.} “Ahhh...ha...a...a...” {Yeah. It was just motivational hype.}

I’ll never forget the time when I was attending a spiritual retreat conference. The speakers had shared a stunning story of calling on God in the hospital waiting room. Their child had been pronounced clinically dead after drowning in freezing waters. But the doctors were working to resuscitate the child because the water had been so cold that it had kept the child’s physical systems from kicking in on the death process. And then the miracle news came. Their child was alive again. They asked us to break into small groups and talk about the power of prayer in our lives. Did we believe God could do great things if we asked?

We heard several great testimonies in our group until the woman sitting next to me, a dear friend, spoke up. The voice had a disquieting flat affect:

“I don’t ever pray for myself like that anymore. I haven’t prayed like that for years. I used to pray like that. But then I noticed that nothing I ever prayed for came to pass. Others seemed to get their prayers answered, but not me. So, I stopped actually praying for things. It hurt too much. I guess God didn’t like me as much as he liked others. So, I just spend prayer time in silence. I’m glad God heard the prayers of our speakers today. But I don’t rate on God’s scale like that.”

The question for us is whether we still believe in a God who makes a difference for those who trust. Do we still believe in a God who promises the Spirit

as something that should matter in our lives? Do we still believe in a God willing to free us from our fears and failures and transform us into people in whom the transformation of the world will happen? Or as Taylor asks, “Have we come to an unspoken agreement that our God is pretty old and tired by now. Someone to whom we may address our prayer requests, but not anyone we really expect to change our lives?”

Do you know what that’s like? Maybe not that much hurt. But has the question of how all this power of prayer and Holy Spirit stuff is actually supposed to work in your life crept in and turned faith into a kind of quiet silence?

Is there a good word about what Jesus believed would happen after Pentecost in our text today? In the story Jesus was in Jerusalem in the last fall year of his life. It was during the Harvest Festival of the Booths when the Pharisees and Sadducees heard the whispers among the crowd who were trying to figure out if Jesus really was the promised Messiah. So they sent the temple police to arrest him. But Jesus responded by saying, “I’m only with you a while longer, then I will return to the one who sent me. You’ll wish you could find me, but you won’t be able to because where I am going you cannot come.” And that thoroughly confused them. What’s he talking about?

That’s when Jesus said that after he left them that anyone who wanted to come to him, who thirsted to find him, “Let that one who believes in me drink. As the scripture has said, ‘Out of the believer’s heart shall flow rivers of living water.’” That’s the Promise of **Access**, the promise of **Hope**, the promise of **Support**, and the promise that their life will be **Empowered ALL IN ONE STORY**. In John’s gospel, the map to find your way to this Pentecost promise is to unfold your belief. Open it up. Lay it out before you and God.

- **Access** will only be hidden for the those who are trying to find him for the wrong reasons.
- **Hope** will only be lost for those who give up looking to him.
- Spiritual **Support** will only become real when we stop hiding from God and confess our failings and our fears in prayer.
- Then, and only then, will the promise of **Empowerment** that is like a river of life flow in us and through us.

Jesus invited all who are thirsty to come and drink from the living water that will lead the way—***if they are willing to be led***. As it turns out, **belief is a gift of God** but the **willingness to be led by the Spirit is a choice we must make**.

In John's Gospel there is a Samaritan woman who once found Jesus waiting at Jacob's well in Sychar. He was waiting until someone with a bucket would come and draw water so he could have a drink. John tells us that a Samaritan woman came and Jesus asked for a drink. The woman said to him,

"You're a Jew and you ask for a drink from my bucket? You know I am a Samaritan, right?" Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water." She looked at him askance and said "Yeah! Right! You don't even have bucket. The well is deep. Where you going to get this living water from?"

To believe in Jesus is to believe that he is this living water. That he sent his Spirit to be after he left to be with the Father. To believe in Christ is to believe in the power of being transformed by our trust in Christ. But to be transformed by trust, we have to actually trust. And then we have to keep trusting. And trusting. And trusting. *For the miracle of what Christ can do with trust is that God can turn that trust into rivers of living water.*

This week, amidst the tragedy of having swept past 100,000 deaths from the virus crisis, our nation was torn apart anew by an act of evil committed by a sociopath wearing the blue uniform of the Minneapolis police. George Floyd was arrested and executed for writing a bogus \$20 check. The nation has seen excerpts of a 9 minute and 46 second cell phone video of the way black people in America are often treated as if they don't have any real rights. Over the days that followed daytime protests turned into evening riots—in lots of cities in our country. But amidst this doubly tragic story I want to share a Pentecost story.

In Atlanta, Georgia several dozen volunteers from local churches gathered Saturday morning to clean up the mess. G. J. Hawkins told CNN that he and his wife, Shanna, had been protesters on Friday before things got out of hand. They believed that they were doing the right thing, exercising free speech to protest that something is deeply wrong in our nation. Then they saw the news of the riots and the destruction after the curfew. So, they made a choice. They banded together with other Christians and showed up to clean up the mess. People from churches all over Atlanta ***showed up***. They said, "We feel like it's our duty as Christ

followers to not only stand up for justice but to also stand up for our city. One of the ways we get to do that is by helping to clean up and start the rebuilding.” Their story was repeated in many of the cities that saw this kind of destruction. As they swept up the trash, put wood on the windows, and cleaned off graffiti the Spirit flowed through them like a river into their world.

So, Pentecost people....take a breath. Keep breathing. Breathe as if breathing itself is a gift of God. Let the air flow like a river that wells up from within as the very breath of God through you. Then listen for what God is calling you to do even if it is with just brooms, and hammers, scrubbing brushes and water. Maybe, just maybe there is yet another holy **CONSPIRACY** God is fomenting that you can let flow into the world.

Amen? Amen.