

The Pentecost story is a story that speaks of breath and a holy, life-giving fire. With the great "Yes!" that the followers of Jesus give to God, the Spirit moves into their lives and ignites that divine fire within them. Many of us have had those formative, Pentecost-like moments in our lives. For me, it was seventeen years ago when I flat-lined in the hospital and had to have a pacemaker implanted to support the electrical needs of my heart. The condition I have is Sick Sinus Syndrome. It's a condition that means my sinus node sometimes forgets to fire. Inside each and every one of us is an internal pacemaker—our sinus node is responsible for initiating the electrical impulse that travels through the heart, causing it to beat in a regular rhythm and heart rate. In my moment of need—when my sinus node failed to fire—the doctors and nurses moved quickly and did everything they could to reignite that rhythm within me. In the seconds where my life was hanging in the balance, they responded with care, courage... and love. I witnessed a moment when strangers spoke those words that we all long to hear—"Your life matters."

Even as I share my story I can't help but think of those stories that ended differently. One such story involves a man who was born the same year I was born. A man, who like me, is the father of two daughters. But, sadly, he is a man who in a critical life moment heard the words, "Your life doesn't matter." George Floyd was a 46 year old man who lived in Minneapolis. He's a man who, like many, lost his job in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic. Tragically, he's yet another black man who spoke the words "I can't breathe" and nothing was done to provide care and help for him in that moment of need.

Two stories with two very different outcomes.

Pentecost isn't a story where we celebrate some abstract concept of breath, fire, and life. It is a story where we celebrate the very breath we breathe—the spark that causes our hearts to beat in a steady rhythm. The Pentecost story is a story of people from different nations coming together and the Spirit guiding them to a place where there is understanding. The walls of difference come tumbling down and those gathered together see something that God wants them to see—that holy, precious, divine fire that exists within all people. The Spirit helps them breathe in that life-giving breath. In this moment we see what God values most of all—the ability to see one another, to TRULY SEE one another. To look upon our neighbour and say, "Your life matters." "The air that we share is just as important for you as it is for me." Pentecost isn't just a day that we celebrate that one spark that brought the church to life. It is a day that we ponder what it means for the church to BE that spark that creates a life-giving rhythm both for ourselves AND for others.

But, just as my heart has an illness that needs support, our world is infected with an illness that is stealing the breath from so many. It is an illness that effects us all. Rev. Paul Raushenbush, a prominent Interfaith leader in the U.S. wrote these words this week:

There is a demon in this land. A demon, whose name is legion, who has infected our collective soul since even before our birth, a demon whose logic, whose power, whose method is degradation, subjugation, death. The demon possessed souls throughout the land, well dressed, respectable, scientific, religious, passing lies as truth to make profits for a few. It is a demon that quotes scripture to mimic divine sanction, that is taught, like Gospel, passing one generation to the next, delighting in the crucifixions of innocents that need no cross to make their point. There is a demon in the land, its power is fear, its weapon is violence, its method is lies, its name is racism...."¹

While some preachers believe that our most important fight right now is the fight to return to our buildings, the winds of the Spirit are moving and urging us to head in a different direction that we might do the work of Jesus

¹ Rev. Paul Raushenbush from "Racism in America: What Will We Preach This Sunday?" churchanew.org

–whose first act was to cast out demons from an ailing, sick man.

Our buildings can aid in this work. But all too often they get in the way of us doing this work. The work of Pentecost is work that requires us to move—to let the winds of the Spirit guide us to the wounded places of our world. As people of faith, we are in a contest between love and fear. It may be counter-intuitive for us to bet on love but that is the bet we have made in choosing to follow in the way of Jesus. Our tradition leans on a God who is rooted in our very breath. The Hebrew name of the God of Israel (Y-H-W-H ...most often transliterated as Yahweh) is rooted in breath. When Jesus breathed his last on the cross the next thing that happened was that the Temple curtain was torn and the wind of God's Spirit moved out. Perhaps all these things (along with the winds of Pentecost Sunday) are there to remind us who we are as participants in creation.

Did you know the word "conspire" means to breathe together. The great Barbara Brown Taylor reminds us of this. "Take a breath. Now blow it out again. There! You have just launched a conspiracy."² Taylor tells us. You can hear the word spirit in there to – to conspire – to be filled with the same spirit, to be alive and by the same wind. As the church, we are called to be co-conspirators with God in this work of love, justice, and peace. Each and every moment that we breathe easy and allow others to do the same, we are in on God's great conspiracy of love and justice.

We're reminded that "The arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice." We as people need to be the ones that help that arc bend toward justice—the knee on the neck of George Floyd was a moment (one in millions) where we saw it bending the other way. We can do the work of rolling up our sleeves, speaking out, protesting, voting... that the arc may bend the other way.

The winds of Pentecost blow on us today and call us to move toward justice and peace. The flames of Pentecost are there to ignite that spark we need to come alive. For Pentecost is a day where we say "Yes" to God, "Yes" to life, "Yes" to our neighbours. The wind of the Spirit is supposed to move through us. And, through each of those actions—those moments of saying "yes"—we allow God's Spirit to move through the world. The wind comes in from God. We breathe in our "Yes!" for the life that it gives us. And then we breathe it out in order that our "Yes" may not simply stay with us... but that it may be given in faith to the world and to those around us.

There is one person that we know was present in the room on the day of Pentecost. She is someone who represents that great "Yes" we're called to give to God and all creation. Mary, the mother of Jesus is there. Acts 1 reminds us of her presence. Richard Rohr tells us that Mary "is Everywoman and Everyman... [she is] the feminine symbol for the universal incarnation. Mary is the Great Yes that humanity forever needs for Christ to be born into the world."³ Mary doesn't simply give a "Yes" to the good moments of bearing the Christ child. She says yes to an inconvenient pregnancy, an unconventional birth, a sorrow-filled moment of weeping beneath the cross... and so much more. She reminds us that life is not simply lived for one moment. We don't simply respond to God once and give birth to the light of the world. Life with God is about birth and rebirth and rebirth and rebirth... And the experience of Pentecost is not limited to one moment in time. The church is called to be a people who celebrate Pentecost after Pentecost after Pentecost after Pentecost...

And so, let us conspire together this Pentecost day (and each and every day) to use our breath in any way that we can to whisper... to sing... to scream for God's justice and mercy to be extended to all.

Let us be the ones who use our breath to tell the whole world "Your life matters." For those are the very words that God speaks to us. Let us fan those flames of love and peace that we might find ourselves lost in God's conspiracy of unconditional love. Amen.

² Barbara Brown Taylor, "Home By Another Way" ©1999

³ Richard Rohr, "The Universal Christ" ©2019