



WESTMINSTER
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

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Divine Intubation

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Acts 2:1-13

A Pentecost Story...I was serving as Interim Pastor for a church in St. Louis a few years ago. For Pentecost we asked everyone to wear red. It was going to be a casual dress service, we were having a church picnic after the service, and I mentioned that I didn't have a red shirt.

A few days later, an older gentleman, life-long resident of St. Louis came to my office with a gift bag, and said, "Here's your red shirt."

I opened it, and it was a red T-shirt with the St. Louis baseball team mascot on it. I told him I couldn't wear this for Pentecost.

He said, and I think he was serious, "Bruce, you don't understand. In the bible the Holy Spirit is pictured as a dove; but in St. Louis, it's a Cardinal!"

I hear the moans of you Pirate fans, but the story illustrates an all-too-familiar confusion about the Holy Spirit.

Even the name...for so long it was the Holy Ghost, even though 'ghost' is nowhere the name found in Scripture. It is 'spirit', the Greek 'pnuema': breath, wind.

And in these days when breath carries an invisible danger, when it's hard to breathe, when we can't breathe, how do we talk about Pentecost?

How do we talk about the 'wind of God' that breathed life into creation? How do we talk about the wind of God that swept over those 120 believers and breathed the church into life?

As always, we listen to Scripture to learn how to talk about breathing the breath of God. What we hear is that there are two Pentecost stories about the Holy Spirit.

There is this familiar story in Acts with the tongues of fire and the church being born as it moves into the streets, a wild and wooly story of power and energy that explodes into the world in fire and the sound of a mighty wind.

Luke describes it as if he was a teenager, “I mean it was, like, tongues of fire; you should have seen it, like, all these people talking in strange languages; like, like, you just can’t imagine how they, like ran out in the streets! You know what I mean?”

Luke also duly notes the conspiracy theory that began that day, “It’s 9 o’clock in the morning. These people are drunk!”

But there is another story of Pentecost that is often forgotten because we have left Easter behind and turned our attention to this day of Pentecost. It is the story in John’s gospel (John 20:19-23) in another room, after the resurrection, the disciples behind locked doors, and Jesus appears.

He says, “Peace be with you” and talks about the disciples being sent out. I don’t think they could imagine just what this ‘being sent’ was going to feel like or look like a few weeks later! Then Jesus breathes on them and says, “Receive the Holy Spirit.”

No fire, no wind in that locked room that day. Just a soft, familiar voice saying to them, “*Shalom aleichem*,” “Peace be with you.”

It wasn't with the force of a wind that would knock them off their feet, but with a soft puff between pursed lips Jesus breathes on them and says, "Receive the Holy Spirit." It is a Pentecost of another kind. Why do you think Jesus breathed on them? I mean, why then?

One reason, someone suggested, could be that dead men don't breathe, so Jesus is showing them, not only with his scars but also with his breath, that he is very much alive.

He is not some phantom spirit or figment of their imagination. And he wants to empower them in a way they've never known before.

To put one's breath into another is the same as putting a bit of one's self in the other person.

Jesus is inserting himself, his spirit, his breath, in them. From now on, they will not be breathing on their own.

Pentecost is a matter of divine intubation. Jesus will be theirs and our Divine Respirator.

In real terms of the day, intubation means we breathe, not on our own, we are not in control; but without it we might not make it. It is meant to save my life.

The breath of Jesus is meant to save the life of everyone, to be given the light and love and oxygen our souls need to breathe.

On the day of Pentecost, about seven weeks after that Pentecost of another kind in John's gospel, all the followers of Jesus received the power of the Holy Spirit, the power of the presence of God inhaled and exhaled, the breath of life itself.

Pentecost reminds us followers of Jesus that we aren't in the world to merely hold religious services. We're sent to the world to live and breathe the message that God's powerful love works through ordinary people to do extraordinary things in the name of Jesus Christ.

We don't breathe on our own. We're no longer in charge. And when we discover that we're not in charge of our breathing, we have a choice: we can be fearful, or we can be faithful.

What choice will we make? Do we dare give ourselves to Christ in such a way that we risk being overwhelmed by his presence, his breath? Do we dare let go?

In a world that makes little or no sense at times, when it seems that life is unmanageable, when we've moved all the way to Plan Z and it doesn't seem to be working and we're frazzled and frustrated, the word is always, "Take a deep breath."

Like the disciples in that locked room, like those believers in that upper room, a deep breath that goes all the way back to creation; they knew that without the breath of God, they could not make it, they could not survive.

And neither can we, neither can we, which is why we need Pentecost, even a Pentecost of another kind.

We need to pray "O Come to us, O Lord, behind the closed doors of our hearts and minds, and breathe your Spirit afresh in each of us. Shake us, disturb us, move us; give us the power and the peace such as none but you can give."

What I've learned from those who have lived long and most profoundly with Christ is to let our very breathing become the breathing of God's breath of life.

The Holy Spirit is wherever we are so that we might be filled with the refreshing, renewing, redeeming peace of Christ.

You see, when Jesus really and truly breathes on us, we breath love into others as he has breathed love into us.

We are sent to the world where so many live without peace: filled with fear, drained by despair, at the edge of hope.

We are sent to the world so that in any language in any place, we speak and live the peace and power of Jesus Christ with each breath we take:

- to meet each challenge with humility,
- every need with generosity,
- every hurt with compassion,
- doing the work Jesus Christ began and through the Holy Spirit gave to us, his church, to continue.

TO GOD BE THE GLORY.



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