

Pentecost A - 2020  
By The Rev. William D. Oldland

The evening class had gathered around the large table. Everyone had a cup of coffee or a soft drink. Some of them had a cookie or some form of refreshment. As they began to take their seats the leader called the group to order and offered a prayer for the evening. Then the leader asked everyone a question. Where have you seen the work of God in your life this week?

Everyone was still for a moment, and then one of the men cleared his throat. He was a family doctor and he had been quiet most of the evenings. Everyone was a little surprised that he would speak first. He said, "I've been a family doctor for a long time now. I've helped people with coughs, infections and such. I have helped bring many of my patients into this world. The other day I was thinking. I have all of this medical knowledge. I help women through their pregnancies. I check on the mother and the unborn child at regular intervals. I can tell if everything is going all right. I can help if there is a problem. I even wait with the mother and father for their child to be born. I take the child and I check them over. I clean out the mouth and the nose. I do everything exactly right.

There is one thing I cannot do. I cannot make that baby take its first breath. I might pinch the baby or pop it on its behind to try and shock it a little. No matter what I do I cannot make the baby take the first breath. This week as I delivered a healthy child and that baby took its first breath I realized something. I've always believed in God, but this week God became real. I realized as I held that child that something bigger than me was in control.

I realized that baby's first breath and every breath there after was through the grace of God. Breathing, life is a gift. After he spoke the room was silent. Yet, there was something mysterious in the air. The feeling from everyone was that they had unintentionally stumbled into one of the greatest mysteries.

The silence was not a pregnant pause as if waiting for someone else in the room to speak. The pause was holy time. The pause was time to ponder the

mysteries of God. It was as if everyone expected God would suddenly speak further on the matter.

And yet, that silence was part of the mystery. God has spoken on this matter or rather, God has breathed. From the beginning of time, God's Spirit hovered over creation. The Spirit moved over the face of the waters at the formation of the earth. The Spirit, the breath of God, moves where it will. Sometimes the Spirit moves silently as in a gentle breeze that doesn't even rustle the leaves. Sometimes the Spirit moves forcefully and suddenly. The Spirit of God moved through the waters of the Red Sea forcing the water back and allowing God's people to walk on dry land. The Spirit moves gently. When we hear the still small voice of God calling to us and saying follow me. The one constant is that the Spirit is always moving.

Sometimes I think we take the presence of the Spirit for granted. We read about the parting of the Red Sea. We read about tongues of fire over the heads of the disciples. We hear about the incredible gift of speaking and hearing in tongues where three thousand are converted on a single day. We tend to think God's Spirit moves in grandiose ways. In order to see God's Spirit alive and well, we want to see immediate grace. We want large actions. We want instantaneous conversions of people before us. We would like to see addicts cured immediately of their addictions. We want to see people near death stand up and walk cured and whole.

But in looking for the grandiose, the huge, the improbable, we miss the wonder, the beauty, the possible.

In the reading from John there is no great fanfare. The wind does not come rushing into the room. Tongues of fire do not appear over the heads of the disciples. Jesus appears before them. He offers them the peace of God. He offers them shalom. Shalom is more than feely hugs and kisses. Shalom is oneness with God. Shalom means being in love with and being loved by God. Shalom is feeling the presence of God coursing through one's own spirit, one's own body, one's own mind. Shalom comes as we open ourselves and receive God's Holy Spirit into our own lives. Shalom comes as we live in the presence of God's Spirit. After offering the disciples peace, Jesus breathes on them. No great wind, No flames. Jesus simply breathes on them. He breathes the Spirit of God onto them. The Spirit of God comes upon them,

and moves through them. The breath of God enters their souls and bodies. They are forever changed. In that moment they experience shalom. They are empowered. They are empowered to go into the world and tell people about Jesus Christ. They are empowered to go into the world and share God's love with others. They are empowered to go into the world and share shalom.

Today we celebrate the coming of the Holy Spirit upon the disciples so long ago. We celebrate the breath of God empowering the disciples to go into the world sharing God's Peace. Today we celebrate the Holy Spirit coming upon us. We are the recipients of the peace of God. God's grace gave us our first breath. Through water and the Spirit we were empowered at our baptism as members of Christ's Body. At our confirmation we are empowered to go into the world sharing in the ministry of God to the needy, the broken hearted, the poor, the sick, and the hungry. We are empowered to share God's love, God's shalom. Our empowerment comes from the breath of God that lives in our heart, mind and spirits. We are forever changed. We see the beauty of God in every sunrise and sunset. We feel the love of God in the wind that caresses our bodies. We hear the wonder of God in the rustle of the leaves, in the singing of the birds, in the first intake of breath at a baby's birth. In all of these ways we experience the power of God's Holy Spirit, subtle, moving, forever present.

An old beggar lay on his deathbed. His last words were to his youngest son who had been his constant companion during his begging trips. "Dear son," he said, "I have nothing to give you except a cotton bag and a dirty bronze bowl which I got in my younger days from the junk yard of a rich lady." After his father's death, the boy continued begging, using the bowl his father had given him.

One day a gold merchant dropped a coin in the boy's bowl, and he was surprised to hear a familiar clinking sound. "Let me check your bowl," the merchant said. To his great surprise, he found that the beggar's bowl was made of pure gold. "My dear young man," he said, "why do you waste your time begging? You are a rich man. That bowl of yours is worth at least thirty thousand dollars."

We Christians are often like this beggar boy who failed to recognize and appreciate the value of his bowl. We fail to appreciate the infinite worth of the Holy Spirit living within each of us, sharing His gifts and fruits and charisms with us. On this major feast day, we are invited to experience and appreciate the transforming, sanctifying and strengthening presence of the Holy Spirit within us. This is also a day for us to renew the promises made to God during our Baptism and Confirmation, to renew our profession of Faith, and to begin anew practice it faithfully, every day.