

In the third verse of Edwin Hatch's hymn, "Breath on me, Breath of God," we sing:

*"Breathe on me, Breath of God,
till I am wholly thine,
till all this earthly part of me
glows with thy flame divine."*

Every year, on this first gathering since everybody – including aunts, uncles, and a few in-laws – filled our pews last Sunday, we hear from John's gospel about the disciples' first encounter with the risen Christ. Now as you may or may not know the readings of the church are on a three-year cycle. We try not to repeat ourselves. We try not to repeat ourselves. And so when there is a reading that is read every year on a particular Sunday we are to pay special attention.

Each year, on this second Sunday of the season of Easter, we experience a Pentecost, of sorts. We typically think of Pentecost happening sometime in late May or early June. At that point we are at the very end of the great 50 days of Easter. Jesus has ascended to heaven. And his followers are gathered together in an upper room when the Holy Spirit overwhelms these disciples with tornadic intensity. They go spewing forth the gospel in every known language and bam, The Church is born. Some are off healing. Others are off sacrificing their lives rather than retracting a single syllable of the truth about Jesus Christ. Peter is off preaching wonderful sermons – like the one we heard earlier this morning – about the true nature of Christ and the meaning of the resurrection. The Pentecost that we celebrate as a feast day is full of power and proclamation.

But today we hear a different kind of Pentecost from John's gospel. And we hear it right after the good news of the empty tomb. As John relates the story the disciples hear from Mary Magdalene that the tomb is empty and that Jesus Christ is somehow still with them. The next thing John relates is the setting for how the disciples respond to this incredible news. Here we find the disciples not going off full of power and might, preaching great sermons and making noble sacrifices. They are huddled away in secret, out of fear that as followers of Jesus they may be in danger. They're probably right. I can't say I blame them. When the going gets tough it is hard not to find a way to escape, to find a place to hide from that which threatens us. I imagine there was not a lot of talking going on. They were probably doing a lot of thinking. Thinking that may have gone something like this: "I can't believe it! Why me? How could I have been such a fool? Look what he has done to us? Because of him my life is over. I just can't believe it. What am I going to do? What will happen if they find us? What am I to do? Where am I to turn?" In this room the natural response would be to feel a bit sorry for oneself and look to blame another for this predicament. All of us may be able to think of one or more times where we have done likewise.

Now if we are lucky, and we have enough time, and enough pluck, we might come around to examining ourselves. Perhaps the disciples might have begun to see themselves not as victims but as perpetrators of their situation. Their thinking might have gone something like this: "Of course, I didn't lift a hand to help... I ate bread and drank wine and did not consider his words, 'This is MY body, this is MY blood.' He told us this would happen. God is in this somehow, and where am I? Hiding! When Jesus was betrayed where was I? When he was arrested where was I? When he was beaten and crucified where was I? When he was raised up from the dead where was I? Hiding. Hiding. Hiding."

This is a tomb of sorts in which they find themselves. The disciples are frozen. They are immobilized, paralyzed, in a sense dead. Into this room, this crowded tomb – inevitably – walks

Jesus, all risen and full of power and glory. The first thing he does is offer them “peace,” peace in the sense of shalom, peace in the sense of wholeness and completion. The second thing Jesus does is impart the Holy Spirit to the disciples – by breathing upon them. How different this Pentecost is than the one we will celebrate in six weeks, where the Holy Spirit comes upon the waiting disciples with great power from high above. The Pentecost we hear in John is much more intimate. There is a familiar duality here. In Genesis, if you read carefully, you find two creation stories. The first – in Chapter 1 – is the creation of all things out of nothing by an all-powerful and transcendent God. Then, in chapter 2, the Genesis narrative starts all over, with God creating man and woman out of the dust of the earth and breathing the breath of God into that dust, giving life. Here, in this closed room, this closed tomb, Jesus scoops up these dead disciples and breathes new life into them. They receive the Holy Spirit, but they do so while Jesus – risen though he is – is still with them. We are to understand that the first experience of resurrection is the imparting of life through the ongoing presence of Jesus Christ with us. Life breathed into us.

In a book from his Narnia series – the book is called *The Horse and His Boy* – C. S. Lewis describes precisely this situation for a boy named Shasta. Shasta grew up as a captive in a cruel and ruthless world, far from his native Narnia, the land of Aslan, a great and powerful lion that is meant to represent Christ. Shasta escapes across a desert (sound familiar?) and after many adventures – including several near-misses with lions – Shasta finds himself lost in deep fog. He was on a mission to warn the people of Narnia of an imminent attack from the terrible land Shasta had escaped. Instead Shasta finds himself lost, riding alone at night in an incredibly thick fog, and feeling utterly defeated.

[Page 161-166]

Is this not Lewis’ version of the Pentecost we heard in John’s gospel. In both did we not hear of the movement from fog and darkness to shining light? Did we not hear how the breath of God created new life? Did we not see one who was especially lost brought to his knees before the presence of life itself? And is this not our story as well? Is this not our night? Our fog? Is this not our savior? Our new life?

In Christ’s resurrection life is breathed into us. There is no fog, no locked room, no self-constructed tomb that can keep us from the presence of God. Jesus is with us. All we have to do is listen for the breath.

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