

June 9, 2019
Feast of Pentecost
Christ Church, Exeter
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No Escaping Pentecost

There are few things more powerful in advertising than the lure of escape. A certain product or experience will help one get out of the place or condition they are in, and experience something different: better, shinier, new and improved. Whether that be the allure and enticement to hit the open road in a new all-terrain vehicle, to fly off to a remote island destination, or shutting the bathroom door in a house of screaming children to take a long hot bath, to perhaps the ultimate escape from day to day reality: to dream to hit it big in the lottery and quit your job by the end of day. The image being sold is that of being transported to somewhere else.

Escape. Run or walk away. Perhaps we have all been open to that pitch or call at different times of our lives. But as inviting as that may seem at the time, when the moment passes, and calmer heads prevail, another thought enters in: how far can we really run from what hurts deep inside? What we think we are missing. How can one escape without leaving everything and everyone we know behind?

I spoke last week about how Jesus was concerned about his followers because he knew that he would leave then and return to the One who sent him.

We eavesdrop in the Gospel reading from John with Jesus both reassuring and challenging Philip. John 14:15-17 -- "If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever.

Pentecost is many things: the beginning and birth of the church and its mission on earth, the sending of the Holy Spirit to animate and activate believers to go out into the world without fear of what awaits. It is about God's breath, or spirit, breathing sacred life into each of us. Good stuff. It about the diversity of God's ways – allowing simple fisherman from Galilee to speak in languages they could have never known so that people far and wide could know of God's power and purpose.

At Pentecost, the great 50 days of Easter are complete. Jesus is raised from the dead, the tomb is empty, his followers experience him resurrected, and then he ascends to heaven and is seen no more. What would fill this holy space?

Some might even ask and wonder if the resurrection and ascension of Christ was his escape from this world. He lived, loved, and then left. Now what?

Pentecost contradicts any idea that we have been left to sort all of this out on our own. Jesus did not leave us to fend for ourselves, to make our own way through life

alone – God sent an Advocate, the Holy Spirit, a comforter who fills us with breath, spirit and hope. This Spirit in Scripture is also described as counselor, guide, intercessor, teacher and witness.

When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. 2And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. Acts 2.

That is what I like to consider the loud Pentecost. There is also another quieter but no less powerful version. It didn't take 50 days. With the doors locked on the evening of the first Easter, the risen Christ came to a house where all the disciples, minus Thomas, were gathered. Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." When he said this, he breathed on them and said "Receive the Holy Spirit."

Spirit and breath and wind all derive from the same root word in Scripture.

In any practice of centering prayer -- finding a place of quiet and stillness and focusing on a single word or phrase that draws the one who is praying closer to God's presence – breathing is key. The body gets settled, feet on the floor, back firm and then breathing in and out begins.

Breathing helps us get through moments of intense pain. Breathing calms and settles. Breathing is life.

It is not enough to explain what Pentecost is all about. It is better to be lived. So, consider the ways that God meets us where we are. Worried, fearful, tired, busy, content, distracted, doubting, overwhelmed – those are the doors Christ walks through and gives us peace. This peace doesn't magically fix all the things going wrong or missing in our world, but it settles us in God's sight and path. Peace.

We are then filled. We are lifted up and inspired when we may have been discouraged or down. We are filled not just for our sake but for others. "As the Father has sent me, so I send you."

God does not promise an escape from this world. That is not what heaven is about or building the Kingdom of God in this world. God the Holy Spirit sends us out into the world. To engage not escape. To head towards and not run away. To mend and heal deep divisions and not just paper over differences and conflict.

We are sent out into the world with God's Spirit each moment, each day, every week to be, as best as we know how, the hands and heart of Christ. That is it. That is all. That is everything.