

“Spirit of Change” – May 31, 2020 – John 20:19-23

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On this Pentecost Sunday we find ourselves still worshipping in our homes, waiting for something to happen. That is a position not unlike the early disciples – those in John’s gospel who were sealed up in a house when the resurrected Jesus came among them, gave them a word of peace, and breathed his Holy Spirit upon them, or like those disciples in the Book of Acts who were gathered together on the Jewish festival of Pentecost, when a loud, rushing wind came through depositing tongues of fire, enabling them to speak the word of the gospel to all people. Whether as a breath from the mouth of Jesus or a fiery wind sent from God, the Holy Spirit of Pentecost comes to humans as an agent of change. When the Spirit of God is active, things happen.

This has been the strangest two and a half months that perhaps any of us have ever lived through. It has brought incredible change to this world – disruptions in our lives we never could have imagined. It has caused us to make choices and sacrifices in order to care for the vulnerable among us. And yes, like so many things, it has also stirred division.

The pandemic has exposed flaws in the systems many of us take for granted. Just having the ability to shelter in place requires a financial stability that so many people do not have. And when we think about those who are called essential workers – the teachers, the support staff, the meat packers, all levels of medical personnel, grocery workers, tradespeople – so many of these essential jobs barely pay a living wage to those who are putting themselves and their families at risk of illness and death to make sure the rest of us have food, utilities, medical help. For the millions out of work or underemployed, health insurance is another concern. How many people have to make a daily decision to go to a job that might expose them to the coronavirus or risk losing their employment?

When it comes to educators, one of the most under-paid professions out there, how many parents, who have been teaching from home these past few months, have said, with humor but also in truth, that we need to be paying teachers so much more than the pittance they currently receive. Will we remember that when the pandemic is over and kids are back in school? Will we work to see that educators are fairly compensated?

And how many other of these essential workers – those who care for our elderly, who stock the shelves, who package the food, who deliver needed supplies – are there things that we can do as the community of the faithful to speak up on their behalf? For these lower wage workers who we all suddenly realize are essential to keeping our lives running smoothly. Many of whom are woman and/or people of color.

So why do I bring this up now? When we’re still stuck in the middle of the pandemic, still not knowing what’s going to happen in the next weeks and months. What can we do now, when

we are all more than a little frustrated that we can't even get out of the house to do the things we yearn to do? It's still an uncertain time for all of us.

I bring this up because I don't want us to forget. Many blatant injustices are coming to light. We realize how important every part of the structure of humanity is, how interconnected we all are, and how much we rely on one another, to not only survive, but to thrive. and not just some of us, but all of us. Is not the gospel of Christ to see each other as beloved children of God, each of us valued for who we are and seen on equal footing?

It is also for this reason that we cannot continue to ignore the blatant instances of racism and hatred that continue to occur in our nation and world. This pandemic is not the Chinese virus, yet people who look Asian are still being discriminated against – the scapegoat toward whom others direct their anger. And black people should be able to jog in their neighborhoods, or watch birds in Central Park, or utilize their building's gymnasium, or buy groceries in a store without being questioned or fearing for their lives.

The Day of Pentecost reminds us that the power of God's Holy Spirit is a power for bringing about great change, and what better time to bring about change, than when in a time of rebuilding and reinventing structures as we live into what will definitely be a new future.

Change is here whether we like it or not. We've seen the disruption caused by this tiny virus. But we've also seen how much we can adapt to this unexpected change. Look at how we have been able to remain the community of the faithful as we worship from our homes, connect via Zoom, and continue to feed the hungry and provide care for the sick in our outreach ministries. How much more can we adapt and change when we are directed by God's Holy Spirit toward a goal of unity among people, fairness, justice, and equality for all, with no exceptions. This has been God's plan from the beginning. This is what Jesus preached about to his disciples. This is where the Holy Spirit is leading us.

We are in a time of change. God's Spirit is an agent of change. It's going to be a bumpy ride, but friends, we have all been invited to tag along. Shall we go?