

May 31, 2020

“I Can’t Breathe”

Imagine just sitting around having brunch with friends one morning, “and suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting.

Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.

I don’t know about you but that would have freaked me out! I’d would be like should we go to the basement, or stop drop and roll and why am I babbling.

According to Marcus Borg in his book Reading the Bible Again for the First Time, the Spirit of this Pentecost undoes the myth in Genesis 11 about the Tower of Babel. In that story God divides everyone by giving them all a different language so that no one can understand each other.

But in today’s story Spirit brings back together the broken and divided community of humankind. Instead of the trickster God that intentionally befuddles humanities ability to communicate we see a God in Acts that brings us together again.

By now I presume that God realized that we have to be able to listen, to hear and to value each other’s stories, and viewpoints and to have empathy and provide comfort for one another in order to survive.

In Acts we see a community that is divided by language, religion and culture be united together by the holy spirit. Bridges are built , divides are crossed, friendships formed, understanding achieved because people can hear one another, people can listen to one another. People can value one another. People can enter into each other’s struggle with empathy, people can speak words of encouragement to each other.

In the rush of the wind and flame all of the sudden The dreams of Old Men mattered, The visions of young men Mattered. The prophecies of sons and daughters and even slaves mattered.

Folks this mutual understanding of each other is the Birth waters of our faith, the very foundation of our Religion. For in this understanding, this love and community we grew and grew. But somewhere a long the way our faith became less about comforting and more about conforming. This radical movement of love and equality became about politics and control. Doctrine and Dogma rather than prayer and Spirit.

It's been a hard week to be thinking about this, to be thinking and knowing that the Holy Spirit has all that power to unite us and we keep refusing it as a people. We keep devaluing old men's dreams, devaluing our prophets, rejecting the value of hearing each other. I can tell you the only time I have ever shifted on anything was when I heard someone speak from the heart about what life was like for them. We have to hear and learn from each other!

We want to believe that in our great country everyone has a voice, everyone has an equal chance, everyone is equal in the eyes of the law but this week once again, we saw that isn't true when the whole world watched George Floyd executed by a police officer while other officers just watched.

It brought back a lot of memories of living in St. Louis when Michael Brown was murdered. Within days there were Black Lives Matter Signs in some yards and We Back the Blue in others, once again lines were drawn, bridges burned, divides entrenched

I remember asking why there weren't yards that had both because it is never either-or on anything! Police needed proper racism training, better leadership, they needed trauma care and tools, time off, and support not tanks and tear gas.

and the stories from people of color, stories of oppression, of humiliation and harassment, stories of the weariness that comes from being under constant suspicion needed to be heard.

Stories of what it is like to live in fear of those sworn to protect us need to be heard. IF we keep trying to pretend that this issue will go away or worse that it somehow isn't our responsibility then we are headed for even harder days. We have to speak each other's language and so we can hear each other's stories.

If you don't think this affects us, ask your self what if a gang of twelve dark skin men showed up in any small town in Wisconsin and appeared drunk and spoke gibberish like the disciples did on Pentecost? Something to think about.

I know that this congregation is very forward thinking on issues of race, you have done a lot of work and study and prayer. But what is the next step, I think it is asking spirit to guide us in ways that help us to not be bystanders to what is happening, how to not be complicit in our silence, how to wield our privilege in ways that help and how to not be a part of the problem by not wanting to offend anyone, ever.

That is what I am guilty of because I never want my challenge to someone's thinking ever make them feel devalued or shamed by me. I just want them to see that I believe and my faith encourages me to believe that everyone has value and that everybody's story has worth and we do not have the right even when we have the privilege to try and diminish their story.

I wish that I could just continue to comfort you in this time of the Covid crisis especially on this day when we are suppose to be celebrating the birthday of the church but how can we? With so

much going on, so much to fear and so many to mourn.

What we can celebrate is that we get the chance everyday to start again, because when we know better we do better. We can celebrate that we can invite the fire and passion of the holy spirit, the wind that can blow out those old fears and behaviors and that we continue to listen to others, to try and meet them where they are, to hear their stories, visions, and dreams and prophecies and tell them that our faith, The spirit of our Christian Story absolutely values them. AMEN"

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