

May 23, 2010  
John 14:25-27; Acts 2:1-4  
First Parish UCC, Brunswick, ME  
© Mary E. Baard

## Come Alive

Have you ever lost heart? Not simply weary, but lost heart – that sense that you're not sure how you will take your next breath, nonetheless make it through the day. Sometimes this happens when you've suddenly lost your job or your portfolio has disappeared, when a marriage disintegrates or a friendship is betrayed, when the veil of depression closes in or the bottle of booze or pills is permanently in your hands. Any of these can weigh like a ton of bricks on our backs. Yet, the reality that grimly grips our hearts time and again is death.

When a person has lived a long and full life there is a rightness to their death. They have come full circle. But when a loved one dies young or prematurely there is a raw fierceness to the wound we experience. That is what happened for the disciples in the time between today's two readings.

The first reading from the gospel of John comes from Jesus' farewell discourse with the disciples before he was arrested. Reading the signs of the times, Jesus is talking with the disciples about the heart of his message. Sensing that he will not be with them much longer, he promises that God's Spirit will come to them and then blesses them with words of peace.

*My peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you....Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.*

That is relatively easy to believe in and trust in when Jesus is with them. Yet, when their loved one is betrayed by one of their own and then executed because of his challenges to the ruling authorities, the disciples lose heart. They are terrified and broken and nowhere to be found.

The only way through such trauma is to not be alone. That is why when someone dies we bring food, we send cards, we give hugs, we hold one another in prayer, we gather to tell stories and just to sit in one another's company.

We are social beings and we need one another when our hearts are breaking. Collectively in this congregation we have been grieving more than usual these last few weeks. Thank you for all the ways you have held tenderly those whose hearts are aching. Thank you for your prayers and for the food provided by the Hospitality committee for receptions. Especially thank you for your presence at memorial services for it is crucial for us to be all together in one place in such times.

And so it was with the disciples. In the trauma of the moment of the crucifixion they scattered, but later they gathered together, although behind locked doors for they were still afraid. In John

20 it says that on that first day of the week when they had gathered together the risen Jesus appeared to them with the familiar words, “Peace be with you,” and then breathed on them saying, “Receive the Holy Spirit.” It is John’s version of a Pentecost experience. The disciples began to move from death to life. Their lost hearts began to beat with hope. The movement of God’s Spirit within and among them set them alive again. This is our calling - to come alive with the blessings of the Spirit.

Howard Thurman, a 20<sup>th</sup> century author, philosopher, theologian, educator and civil rights leader wrote,

*Don’t ask yourself what the world needs. Ask yourself what makes you come alive, and go do that, because what the world needs is people who have come alive.*

Coming alive is dramatically depicted in our second reading – the day of Pentecost from the book of Acts. Pentecost was not a new Christian festival invented by the disciples. It was a Jewish harvest festival that happened on the 50<sup>th</sup> day (thus the penta in its name) after Passover. Jesus followers were there for the festival for they still understood themselves as Jews, who were followers of Jesus.

Festival energy is contagious. Pilgrims had poured into Jerusalem for the festival. They came from all over and spoke many different languages. The energy was palpable, but then it blew wide open. The Spirit seems to like stirring up a gathering. Who knows what will happen at the picnic today!

Rush of a mighty wind?

Flaming tongues of fire?

The ability to speak other languages?

The disciples hearts are set ablaze. In fact, as Dr. Seuss might say, “Their hearts grew three sizes that day.” They come alive with their visions and dreams and are empowered to share those even with people who speak other languages.

We speak different languages, right here in this sanctuary. I know some of you speak French, Spanish, German, Russian, Cantonese, and I suspect others. But I also mean we speak different languages in the sense that we come at the world from different perspectives.

We speak different political languages. We speak different generational languages. We speak different vision languages. We come at the world with different values, different priorities, different viewpoints. And sometimes we have a hard time opening our minds and our hearts to hearing what each other have to say.

In talking with a parishioner recently, we were remembering the conversation we had as a congregation a few years ago about the Iraq War. Over a hundred people came. As various people spoke that day about their convictions and experiences it was clear that we speak different languages. That was not really news. The Pentecost flavor of that day for me was about the way the facilitator helped us not just to speak but also helped us practice listening to others. He did this by structuring a time of silence after each person spoke. It transformed our experience.

I was struck by how this time of silence became a time of heart for me. As someone I disagreed with was speaking, my head was preparing a counter argument. But in the following silence, there was a surprise. There was a shift from my head to my heart and I found myself focusing on the person who had spoken and was reminded of my covenant with that person in the body of Christ. How did that happen? It was the work of the Spirit. Sometimes the Spirit works in a mighty wind, and sometimes it is a gentle nudge and opening.

In our tradition we speak of God, Christ, and Spirit. This Trinity expresses the different ways we experience The Holy. Generally I find that people feel more comfortable focusing on one part of the Trinity in their own spirituality. Some people focus on Jesus. I think part of that is because we can identify with his experience of sharing our common lot as a human being. Others are uncomfortable with Jesus because of all the exclusive Savior talk they have experienced. Some people focus on God in heaven. In one respect this focus is on God as creator, but I also suspect it helps us to think we can keep God separate from the rest of our messy lives.

But then there is the Spirit. It points to our experience of the Holy that is totally unpredictable and unseen. It can seem a bit creepy at times. The Spirit blows where it will and we never know where or when. This challenges our egos' perceptions that we are in charge of our lives. The Spirit depicts the mysterious character of God's ongoing and intimate presence in our lives. The Spirit is life itself.

The ancients knew the mystery and truth of the intertwining of spirit and life. In Hebrew we find the word ruah and in Greek it is pneuma. Each of these words means breath, wind, and spirit all at once. The meanings are intertwined. In today's Pentecost experience the wind is stirred up as the Spirit moves among them and the disciples are given breath to proclaim the good news. They come alive.

Sometimes the Spirit cannot be ignored, but sometimes it is a still small presence. Maybe one of the ways we should watch for the movement of the Spirit in our own lives, individually and collectively is to ask the question what makes us come alive?

*Don't ask yourself what the world needs. Ask yourself what makes you come alive, and go do that, because what the world needs is people who have come alive.*

People who have been touched by the Spirit.