

Pentecost 2020: George Floyd and the Holy Spirit
May 2020

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In Hebrew, the word for Spirit can also be translated as wind and breath. Psalm 104 is a good example:

When you hide your face, they are dismayed;
when you take away their breath, they die
and return to their dust.
When you send forth your spirit, they are created;
and you renew the face of the ground (Psalm 104:29-30).

Breath and spirit are the same word. When people experience God's absence, we die and return to our pre-creation state, the dust of the ground. But when we experience God's presence, creation and renewal occur. This year at Pentecost, we are stuck somewhere in the middle of those realities.

At another harvest festival, the Festival of Booths or Tabernacles, Jesus said, "Let anyone who is thirsty come to me, and let the one who believes in me drink. As the scripture has said, 'Out of the believer's heart shall flow rivers of living water.' Now he said this about the Spirit, which believers in him were to receive..." (John 7:37-39). We are thirsting for justice and peace; not peace only. We are thirsting for a renewal of community; not a return to the way things were. We are thirsting for healing of brokenness and mistrust. The living water Jesus promises is another mark or sign or portent of the Holy Spirit. It is housed within the hearts of believers-- yours and mine-- waiting to burst out in a flood of mercy and love.

Pentecost 2020. We're still waiting for the Holy Spirit to show up and share the Good News in words every single person can hear and understand. When the Holy Spirit comes upon us, we will know it: new life will come to a defeated church and society. Until it comes, we wait expectantly.

Spirit of God, Wind of God, Fire of God, make known your presence, your work, your justice, and your love real to the world through us. Here we are, your church on mission, your hands and feet in the world. Set our hearts on fire.

What are the promised signs of the coming of the Holy Spirit?
How do we practice hope, while waiting? What actions would help bring about God's justice?
How does racism and white supremacy stifle the work of the Holy Spirit?

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The Psalmist, Ahmaud Arbury, and our Mothers
May 2020

Psalm 31

In you, O Lord, I seek refuge;
do not let me ever be put to shame;
in your righteousness deliver me.
Incline your ear to me;
rescue me speedily.
Be a rock of refuge for me,
a strong fortress to save me.

You are indeed my rock and my fortress;
for your name's sake lead me and guide me,
take me out of the net that is hidden for me,
for you are my refuge.

Into your hand I commit my spirit;
you have redeemed me, O Lord, faithful God.

My times are in your hand;
deliver me from the hand of my enemies and persecutors.
Let your face shine upon your servant;
save me in your steadfast love

"Life in the meanwhile," as our Psalms Bible study described the now and not yet of a life in faith. God promises a future of freedom and joy, even as we are beset by challenges in the present. Since the psalms are poems, prayers, and hymns, meant to be shared together in community, they speak to a collective need as well. The psalmist's needs are our own: deliverance, salvation, for God to be a rock and strong fortress when we require protection and safety.

1 Peter 2:4-5 says, "Come to him, a living stone, though rejected by mortals yet chosen and precious in God's sight, and like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ." 1 Peter was written for persecuted Christians who feared for their lives because of their faith. They may have felt isolated during their time of crisis; the writer wants them to feel comfort in their togetherness. Let yourselves be built into something bigger and stronger than you are on your own. Submission, vulnerability, obedience are part of the equation. "Life in the meanwhile:" between current persecution and future deliverance.

In John Chapter 14, Jesus says, "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house there are many dwelling places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also. And you know the way to the place where I am going. I am the way, and the truth, and the life. Not one of you comes to the Father except through me." "Life in the meanwhile:" Jesus, aware of the disciples' grief, speaks to their pain and gives them confidence to look beyond their current circumstance to the assurance of reunion with him after his resurrection.

"Life in the meanwhile" binds all believers into one living structure; a fortress, a building, a house. All people are made one family in one dwelling place. We are neighbors to each other. We are responsible for each other. When one achieves a victory, we all win; when one suffers, we all grieve. Anyone who has ever lived with another person, however, knows that when people are together everyone has their own stuff. If we do not have a clear understanding of what it means to live in community we will experience conflict and pain.

After I learned this week of the murder of Ahmaud Arbury, an unarmed African American man at the hands of armed white men, familiar questions from scripture popped into my head: "Who is my neighbor?"; "Am I my brother's keeper?" I was compelled to grab Jesus and the Disinherited by the great Dr Howard Thurman. Originally published in 1949, it puts theological flesh on the question of who is our neighbor-- in the context of racial injustice in America. Here is what Dr Thurman writes, answering the question of who is neighbor:

"Once the neighbor is defined, then one's moral obligation is clear. In a memorable story Jesus defined the neighbor by telling of the Good Samaritan. With sure artistry and great power he depicted what happens when a man responds directly across the barriers of class, race, and condition. Every man is potentially every other man's neighbor. Neighborliness is nonspatial; it is qualitative. A man must love his neighbor directly, clearly, permitting no barriers between."

What barriers exist that keep people from being neighbors in Georgia in 2020?
What barriers exist in Sherman or Britain or wherever you are today?
By our silence and inaction are we permitting them to exist?
"Life in the meanwhile": how do we build an anti-racist church?

