

It had been only fifty days since Easter, but ten days earlier Jesus had returned to heaven. It was not a healthy moment. The disciples were afraid to share what they were certain they believed and locked themselves in a room out of fear and uncertainty about what came next. Returning to the world without Jesus doing all the teaching and caring was scary. They feared being ridiculed, persecuted, or being ineffective in following Jesus' instructions for their discipleship. These are the background issues of this day of Pentecost. This is the day when God empowered believers so that they would never again be afraid to tell whose we are!

I once read a book about relationships titled, "Why Am I Afraid to Tell You Who I Am?" How appropriate, as there can be no hiding or pretending if a relationship is to succeed. If partners aren't open, honest, and reveal all that is, any relationship will fail. In any relationship, rather than silence being golden, it is the kiss of death.

How sad it would be for a child to not know whether they were loved. How would an apprentice learn a trade if someone experienced didn't share the ropes? Do your friends know what you believe, or do they have to guess? Are there people around you who would love to learn more about Jesus but don't know how or who to ask? Why are we so timid to acknowledge the faith that guides and leads us every day?

Most rely on the Church for comfort and support, but sometimes forget its priority to share the good news of Jesus' saving love. Disciples are called to lead as we have been led. We are comfortable when others offer a prayer or lead a Bible study but sometimes when it comes to me, knees start shaking and nerves run wild. At the same time, we are surrounded by those who are not afraid to say, "I don't believe in God," or ridicule anyone who does. What is our response to a broken world? Will we hide in "upper rooms," or will we find it in ourselves to admit what we believe?

For many years Christians were anxious to carry the message of Jesus love throughout the world. Now Christians are being told we should not impose such beliefs on others, in the midst of a culture that has very definite ideas about what we should believe on any number of subjects. We are so worried about being laughed at our marginalized as Christians that we have been talked into silence and shamed into hiding who we are.

We know what we believe, but for some reason are often afraid of not having the right words or wondering if the time is right. Faith simply means we know we are. If we know whose we are, why would we ever be hesitant to stand up for what we believe. We have Good News: an empty tomb and a loving God. But often we become tongue tied and closet believers. I agree it is difficult when we feel we are standing all alone or might lose more than we gain if we admit to faith in Christ. Like disciples who locked themselves away it is sometimes easy to feel we are standing all alone.

I remember how difficult it was to shoot free throws in a basketball game when the gym suddenly became quiet, and all eyes were on me. I remember standing on the first tee in golf matches when coaches and players from the other schools stood and watched and I just hoped I wouldn't hook my drive out of bounds. When it gets quiet and everyone is watching, fear became more powerful than simply doing what should be

natural and come easy. But what is the worst thing that can happen if someone knows what I believe, or how Jesus' love has changed how I live?

Don't we have similar nervous moments when it comes to sharing faith? When someone asks what we believe or someone else shouts "there is no God?" Do we bow our head to pray in a restaurant or worry that someone might be offended or think we are weird? What makes us nervous about something that should be so easy? Jesus promises disciples He will help with whatever brings us fear. Jesus says, "*I will never leave you alone. I will give you the gift of God himself!*"

"Holy Spirit" means "holy wind" and it changed their lives and ours. At creation God simply breathed a word and creation appeared! At the Exodus flood waters were blown away by God's breath as the Red Sea was parted by a "Holy wind." And on Pentecost, God's holy breath filled the disciples of Jesus with the same power that had rolled the stone away, and they were released from their upper-room-fear.

A book called "Snow Falling on Cedars" is about a murder in a fishing village near Seattle, soon after the war with Japan. A popular fisherman was found dead. The assumption was a fisherman of Japanese ancestry was the murderer. He was jailed and put on trial. With cultural prejudices and residual hatred after the war, the fisherman knew whatever he said might be suspect, so he said nothing at all. Having a chance to proclaim his innocence he quietly sat in his cell and said nothing. He was afraid to say who he was! Fear trapped him just as it had trapped disciples.

In hindsight, had he simply told his truth, he would have been immediately set free. But he feared not being believed. And the same is often true for us. We have God's living breath inside and around us. We call it faith! If Jesus is the reason for what we do or say, we should never have any problems letting that light shine. Why hesitate to share who we are, or if asked to explain, how that came to be? If you focus on your inhibitions, the only breath you have is your own. But since the door has been opened and stone rolled away why let old life keep you confined? Faith believes God will use us as we are, wherever we are. Why else do you think Jesus chose ordinary, imperfect people, to be disciples if not to show us what we are capable of as well?

In Romans 8:26 Paul writes, "*Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words.*" Our groans or sighs are often the only breath we can muster. It is the best a sinful world can create. But the Holy Spirit fills lungs with Holy breath. As we breathe deeply our sighs become not empty words but a holy wind. Our living becomes a holy love. And the darkness is replaced by His light!

The gift of Jesus and the power of his Holy Spirit was God saying, "I am not afraid to tell you who I am ... and I will help you so that others will see and feel my presence in you!" It is not a matter of asking God to give us the strength or wisdom to do so. He already has. Either we hide who we are behind locked doors or become comfortable living the lives that God has restored as a gift. God has not been afraid to love us, die for us, or promise us his grace. Why should we ever be afraid to be honest about how that has changed us, and whose we are?

As we have learned in so many ways, practice makes perfect. And if not perfect, it at least heads us in the right direction. And what does that mean other than doing what

we need to do, over and over again? Love God. Love Neighbor. Don't hide your light under a basket but let it shine. This is who I am. This is whose I am.