

What do you do when you are afraid, or lonely, or depressed? Do you sit in the sunshine, run into the park with friends, or do you find a quiet and dark place to be alone. Isn't it interesting that when we most need help we hide? And when don't want to be alone, we insist on it? And when we are afraid we go to a darker place? Isn't that the irony of sin in our lives and the brokenness that prevents healing?

Today is Pentecost, and we know of that day from Luke's book called ACTS. John knew of that day (he was there) and when he wrote his Gospel, he recalled a moment after Easter with the same theme and power. It took place in an upper room, where the disciples were huddled in fear (after Easter!) They were singing the blues. They were hiding in the dark. They were confused and paralyzed without Jesus at their side.

Do you remember how Jesus took disciples to upper room for last supper – what an interesting location! (Behind locked doors, away from the hustle and bustle of Jerusalem at Passover.) And he broke bread and washed feet. They would never forget that night. And so, after Easter, when they were again huddled in the familiar place of an upper room, Jesus chose that moment to help them understand there would never again be a need to fear or uncertainty of how to live. And he did a most interesting thing – he breathed on them and said, “My life is now in yours!” And he gave them their marching orders to continue the ministry he had begun, just as he did on the day of Pentecost.

What is most powerful about the Christian faith is that it begins with fear and doubt – real world stuff! There was no sugar coating or pretending, their first reaction to Easter, and then to Jesus' physical departure wasn't pretty.

The disciples who had been with Jesus for three years didn't understand completely what He had done or why. Behind locked doors they were like prisoners who were bound and gagged, except they (like us) had done that to themselves. Think about how this “upper room” became such a comfortable and safe place for them – and how it showed what life with Christ is truly like! The locked doors certainly offered them protection from whatever they feared, but the price they paid was to hide the good news of Easter behind locked doors! Were they more afraid of being arrested or not being believed? Were their own fears more powerful than an empty tomb? Did doubt get in the way of faith?

When Jesus appeared in the upper room after Easter, it is interesting that having freed himself from a locked tomb, he returned to the *upper-room-tomb* his followers had locked themselves into. Rather than live in the glow of Easter, they blindfolded themselves in the darkness of a locked room. In a sense, he broke into their “tomb.” And Jesus brought Easter's life into that of his disciples. Having overpowered the finality of death, he brought that same power to the disciples to free their living from the gag orders of uncertainty and fear. The miracle of Easter now made even more sense for those disciples – and for us.

Finally their eyes were opened, and their voices could be heard. But only when Jesus revealed his wounds, were their eyes opened and their fears and doubts removed. They were no different than you and I as we wonder how strongly we believe. We want proof. We want reassurance. And we aren't alone ...

As I wrestled with this moment, I began to wonder if doubt and fear are not the opposite of Faith, but part of it? For where there is no doubt and fear, there is no need for faith. When we think we have all the answers and when we pretend we can get whatever we want, there is no room for faith. Rather than condemn these disciples for their honest fears and doubts, celebrate that Jesus' love was necessary to heal that dis-ease!

Today, we celebrate Pentecost, when Jesus broke back into that same upper room with wind and light – a rushing sound and a sparkling flame. He stirred things up just as God had stirred the darkness of precreation and he chased that darkness away, just as he had done when he created Light!

Suddenly, filled with the power and assurance that they were not alone, this band of brothers opened the doors of that upper room and never went back. From here on, they were fearless, bold, and unrestrained in their witness! Nothing could slow them down. Nothing could hold them back. Even the threat of prison couldn't keep them from telling over and over again what Jesus had done.

They were the same guys they had always been, but now but God's gift of faith became more powerful than their weakness and human frailty. Day after day, the authorities would attempt to silence that witness. But jail cells and confinement couldn't keep them quiet -- just as the heavy stone at the tomb couldn't keep Jesus from life! What changed? What happened? And what might be helpful for us today?

Jesus unlocked the hearts of the disciples. He breathed on them, saying, "Receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." This fresh wind was God's own breath. It was the sound of death being shattered. It was the power of creation. It was the life that emerged from the tomb and chased disciples out of an upper room.

Paul describes that same gift in a different way. He wrote, "To each is given the *manifestation* of the Spirit for the common good." In other words, God gives to EACH a way to SHOW or REVEAL his presence in life. Now, the best way to understand your gift is to begin in your "upper room." What brings you the most fear? What is your greatest doubt? What causes you to hide behind closed doors and keeps you from confidence in your living?

I believe, that like disciples that is where you need to begin. Acknowledge your weakness and your questions and then surrender that to the God who is breathing and living and has his arms wrapped around you already. When you aren't afraid to admit who you are, then you understand how powerful a gift faith is, and the doors will open, the wind will blow, and the light will shine!

This is how God works – how he shows us the gifts that are already given and just waiting to be unwrapped, celebrated, and shared. He does it in communion, in prayer, in worship, in servant love, in study of scripture, and it all begins in that upper room. As we simply stand before God, in faith, he removes the blindfold and sends us into the light of Easter's dawn. His breath always changes doubt or confusion into faith.

A first reaction to discipleship, witness, commitment language often is nervousness. We are more comfortable locked in our upper rooms saying, "I'm no Bible thumper, holier than thou, and maybe a little embarrassed about sharing by faith. I am not like those disciples on Pentecost."

But are we any different? Remember who they were. Fishermen and farmers. Some were educated and some were not. And there were women and children and Samaritans who were part of the group as well. Jesus' followers were certainly a collection of assorted souls and backgrounds! Just like all of us! We are a collection of difference, a variety of ages, talents and dreams. Just like Jesus' disciples! We are the same and we have the same promise of being filled with the breath of his Spirit!

If one holds breath, closes eyes, clenches fists, refuses to respond, no matter how powerful God's love, lives won't change ... but when I open myself and Spirit fills lungs, and eyes are filled with light there is LIFE!

We are reminded this morning that the risen Jesus stands next to us breathing his life into ours. His words to us are simple and pure. "As the Father sends me, so I send you." And also "receive the gift and power of my Holy Spirit." What a breath of fresh air. What a precious gift of life.

I once had a conversation with someone who reminded me of a simple sentence I had shared that moved them from fear and grief. To be honest, it was something that wasn't planned. It just happened. If I had tried to be clever or helpful, I would have failed. God used a moment and my presence and did something with it that I never could have done on my own. That is how God's gifts are manifest in us!

Remember doubt is but the beginning of faith, and fear is only the darkness that precedes Easter's dawn. God has done the heavy lifting, and placed in your life the gift of faith that you need. Simply become what his love has given you to be.

Doubt and fear are simply what make you human. Faith is what will daily lift you up and set you free! And when that happens, why go back to that upper room ever again? Receive the gift of the Holy Spirit and go in peace!

-tws