

**Sermon**  
**John 20:19-24**  
**The Day of Pentecost – A • Sunday, May 31, 2020**  
**Gloria Dei Lutheran Church, Coos Bay, Oregon**

*Before time began...* God created the heavens and the earth and all that is in them. God commanded the earth to put forth vegetation, plants yielding seed, and fruit trees of every kind that bear fruit with the seed in it. And it was so. God's voice commanded that the waters bring forth swarms of living creatures, and birds to fly above the earth. And God created the great sea monsters, and every living creature that moves, the wild animals of the earth, and the cattle of every kind, and everything that creeps upon the ground. And God saw that it was good.

But still, God was lonely. Then God said, let us make humankind in our own image. And the LORD God formed man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being.

***What does this mean for us?***

The Greeks call this breath, **Pneuma** (πνεῦμα), which is an ancient word for "breath", and in this context, pneuma means "spirit" or "soul." Other living things were created, but the human was given a soul when he received the Holy Spirit in the very breath of God. Another word, ruach implies a power that is within God's breath and in wind, which is connected to the name Yahweh. The Holy Spirit is the power emanating from Yahweh, the creator God. It is Yahweh's power that puts all things into motion. It is Yahweh's power through this ruach that breathes life into all creation.

*Thousands of years later*, in about 29 AD (or 29 CE, as scholars now call it), God came to dwell on earth and took on a human body. His human name was Jesus.

He taught and healed and treated everyone with radical, subversive love. He challenged the religious authority of the time, and for that, he was hung on a tree and murdered. But proving that death does not have the last word, that he came to save all of us from the finality of death, Jesus rose from the dead three days later on the morning of what we now call Easter.

On the evening that very first Easter, Jesus made an appearance in the locked upper room where his frightened disciples were hiding from the authorities. He came and stood among them and said, 'Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.' When Jesus had said this, he breathed on them that pneuma, that ruach from God and said to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit.'

***What does this mean for us?***

In his life, Jesus showed us what the life God intends for all of us, looks like. It's a life of radical inclusion and compassion. And his example was such a profound departure from the ways of the world, that following his example today, isn't easy. It's more than pouring water over your head. It's more than Zooming a church service on Sunday morning. It's more than reading your Bible faithfully and following the 10 Commandments. Our life from God is a life of death and resurrection. It's dying to the

ways of the world around us and being resurrected to a Jesus Way of life. It's saying no to segregated gatherings and yes to open communities of faith. It's saying no to injustice and the exploitation of the poor, and instead, saying yes to justice and service to all who are in need. It's saying no to violence in all its forms, and yes to compassion and understanding. It's saying no to our need to be the best and have the most, and yes to cooperation and denying ourselves for the sake of others.

It's saying no to "What's in it for me?", and yes to "What does it mean for the community? What does it mean for the world?" It's saying no to judgmentalism, and yes to love.

*This past Monday night* in Minneapolis, nearly 2000 years after breathed on his disciples, forty-six year-old George Floyd, down on his luck, passed a counterfeit \$20 bill to a store clerk. George Floyd, who has been described by his friends as a gentle giant, a man of God, was taken into custody by the authorities, handcuffed and forced to the ground. An officer held him pinned to the ground with a knee on his neck. At least one witness, Donald Williams, told CNN that he was about to walk into a store when he saw Floyd "panting for his life." As he was crying for mercy, George Floyd's last words were "I can't breathe..."

Then he was murdered.

The breath of life that was breathed into him by his creator, was snuffed out.

### ***What does this mean for us?***

Cory Booker, the US Senator from NJ said Friday night, "The question is no longer, Are you or are you not a racist? The question now is, what are you going to do about it? It's not enough to claim that you are not racist. You must become actively anti-racist."

Our parent church body, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) reaffirms its commitment to combating racism and white supremacy following the recent murders of Black Americans.

Ahmáud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, Dreasjon (Sean) Reed, and George Floyd were our neighbors.

On its website, the ELCA has issued the following statement: "As the Conference of Bishops, we condemn the white supremacy that has led to the deaths of so many unarmed Black, Indigenous, and Persons of Color in our country. We grieve with, pray for and stand in solidarity with the families and friends of all whose loved ones have been and continue to be victims of injustices run amok, racist violence and the insidious venom of white supremacy."

Following Jesus has always been a subversive perspective in this world. When our positions cease to be subversive, when our actions become part of the status quo, they cease to be the Jesus Way. If you're watching today because you want to follow the way of Jesus, really follow Jesus, then this very gathering is a subversive activity. If this community is not here to reinforce the values of the status quo but to push us toward living the Jesus way, we are a subversive community. It may not be for everyone. But if you're being called to a Jesus way of life, to open yourself to God's Spirit of transformation, to encounter death and resurrection in your life. And to get ready for the breath of God.

And so I ask you, dear friends, how is the Spirit of the living God blowing around, moving in, surprising you in your life?

I wonder about what, when, and where might the next Pentecost take place?

Who might it involve? How will YOU be involved?

How might *this* community of faith respond to God's call and, empowered by the Holy Spirit, respond in faith to the summons issued by God through the needs of neighbor and community?

The Holy Spirit will most certainly lead us to go where love leads and to serve where love calls - filled with peace, joy and the courage to boldly participate in what God is up to in the world.

This is the central importance of Pentecost: the Holy Spirit's coming into the church to create a community of disciples that goes back out into the world transformed to do what God has required of you - to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with our God.

Amen.