

Olivet Christian Church Worship
Sunday, May 17, 2020
6th Sunday of Easter

Call to Worship

In the face of a culture of death
a world of killing fields
a world of the walking dead
Christ is at the head of the resurrection parade
transforming our tears of betrayal into tears of joy
giving us dancing shoes for the resurrection party

And this glittering joker
who has danced in the dragon's jaws of death
now dances with a dance that is full
of nothing less than the fullness of God

this is the dance of the new creation
this is the dance of life out of death
and in this dance all that was broken
all that was estranged
all that was alienated
all that was dislocated and disconnected
is reconciled
comes home, is healed
and is made whole

Pastoral Prayer

Most Holy God,
In this time of prayer we draw near to you,
Trusting that you are already near to us—
As close as our breath, as close as the heartbeat
within our chest.
You are brilliant and powerful,
The Delight of the heavens, the Song of the
mountains, the Hope of the nations.
We are awed by you.

We come to you out of humility;
Be the Boast of our faith.

We come to you out of thirst;
Be the Wellspring of life.

We come to you full of gratitude;
Be to this world the Source of all goodness and love.

We come to you with weary and weeping hearts;
Be the End of all strife and the Beginning of all peace.

We come to you, Holy One, because it is in you
that we live and breathe and have our being;
Be the Glory of our words, of our actions, of our aspirations.

And now, by the power of your name, raise us up:
From death to resurrection,
From fear to imagination,
From worry to love,
From the dust to the stars,
From silence to song.

We pray these things and more, for we are yours
in this life and yours in new life. Amen.

Scripture: *John 14:15-21 (CEB)*

¹⁵ "If you love me, you will keep my commandments. ¹⁶ I will ask the Father, and he will send another Companion, who will be with you forever. ¹⁷ This Companion is the Spirit of Truth, whom the world can't receive because it neither sees him nor recognizes him. You know him, because he lives with you and will be with you.

¹⁸ “I won’t leave you as orphans. I will come to you. ¹⁹ Soon the world will no longer see me, but you will see me. Because I live, you will live too. ²⁰ On that day you will know that I am in my Father, you are in me, and I am in you. ²¹ Whoever has my commandments and keeps them loves me. Whoever loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love them and reveal myself to them.”

Message

Rev. Coletta Eichenberger

In Sanskrit, the word is *prana*, in Hebrew, it is *ruach*, in Greek, it is *pneuma*, In Latin, it is *spiritus*, in Chinese, the word *Chi*, means *aliveness, life force energy, or life breath*.

In English, we have two words for “breath” and “spirit”, but in each of these other languages, the word for breath and spirit is the same; one word, signifying that there is no separation between the two.

Take in a deep breath with me, let it out. Take in another breath, let it out.

We rarely, if ever, envision that we are breathing in the living Spirit of God when we breathe, but clearly, these many languages and the cultures they represent understood that when we breathe, we are not just doing a physiological act of taking in oxygen, and expelling carbon dioxide, we are, in fact, taking in LIFE! We are receiving the power and gift of the Holy Spirit, given to the disciples in that time when Jesus leaves their physical presence and promises them that they will not be orphaned, but will have a COMPANION, an ADVOCATE to support, sustain, and in-spire them on the path ahead of them to carry on the ministry begun with and in him. HOLY SPIRIT!

Spirit has defied our attempts to shape or describe "Him" or "Her" (many consider the Spirit to be a feminine presence). The Spirit remains a deep and often inaccessible Mystery, one that is nevertheless at the heart of our faith, a Mystery that never abandons us, just as Jesus promised. In popular culture, some of you may be familiar with the book and the movie called “The Shack”, in which the name that the Holy Spirit goes by is Sarayu. The actor portraying Christ in the movie says “Sarayu is creativity, action, the breath of life. She is my spirit and even if you can’t see it, you are in the center of our love and purpose.” The name is said to mean “wind”, or “river”. Throughout the story, wherever and whenever Sarayu appears, which is more of an ephemeral image floating above the earth, life appears! Flowers and trees bloom, anxieties are calmed, and beauty replaces scenes of desolation. Forgiveness and grace infuse a hardened heart.

Native Americans, among others, believe that life enters the body with the first independent breath, not at the moment of birth or conception. In Jewish tradition, “ensoulment”, or the moment when a human being is believed to have a soul, is when the first breath of life is taken at birth. The primary Jewish imagery for the beginning of life comes from Genesis 1:2 where BREATH hovers above the waters of earth before LIFE emerges from the cosmic womb. Our words, *INSPIRE*, *INSPIRATION* come from the Latin, *spiritus*. Literally, in-spiration means to take in spirit. Synonyms for “inspiration” include such words as: creativity · inventiveness · innovation · ingenuity · imagination · originality · individuality · artistry · expressiveness · creative power · creative talent · creative skill · genius · insight · vision · wit · finesse · flair · brilliance · You get the picture, and hopefully, grasp the richness of how all of these are ways that human beings channel the power of the Spirit to express

their gifts, insights, and creativity, even if they do not attribute such gifts as coming from the Spirit, I believe we would be hard pressed to describe their source otherwise.

Middle English, inspiration was understood to mean “*divine guidance*”. To *ASPIRE* is to long for, to seek something higher, we often use it to mean to hope for; and when we *CONSPIRE*, for good or ill, we literally are *BREATHING TOGETHER*, with our companions to accomplish something bigger than any one of us alone can do. You may have heard me talk about our “*BODY SPIRITS*”, as a concept I picked up in being a student and teacher of InterPlay, a practice that honors the wisdom of the body. Our *BODY SPIRITS* are bigger than, far more extensive than the size and location of our physical bodies. We can extend our *BODY SPIRITS* anywhere on the planet, to the farthest reaches of the cosmos, because our imaginations of connecting with someone on the other side of the planet, or the infinite creativity of our Creator are limitless, if we dare to go there! And what do we do when we pray, if not reach to God with our hearts, and thoughts, words or silence, on behalf of someone we love, we care for, we walk with? We support them in times of challenge or struggle, not unlike the way Jesus told the disciples that God would send them a *COMPANION* for the journey. “I will not leave you orphaned.” In my mind, these are so interconnected that we cannot separate our breath, from our spirit, *THE SPIRIT*, our prayers from the amazing gift Jesus left for us in the *HOLY SPIRIT* when he left this world.

When do you feel inspired? Is it when you hear a piece of beautiful music, a familiar hymn, an a capella choir, a jazz riff, or a thumping bass? Look at an amazing painting, piece of pottery, sculpture? Is it in being alone with and at one with a tree, a flower, the ocean, a mountain, your beloved pet? Or when you hear and feel the

power of words so intricately put together that they reach into a place inside of you that you had not known or had forgotten? When you witness the passion of those who call us to live out our faith in acts of justice and unity with the marginalized, the dispossessed, the forgotten, imprisoned, or sick in dire need of a healer; in need of someone who is a voice for them? Someone who is an *ADVOCATE*?

Barbara Brown Taylor, in her sermon, “Good News for Orphans” uses the parent/child image to describe the feeling of security that children long for when they're left alone. They want to be reassured that someone greater, stronger, smarter is not only present but in charge. And they want to be reassured that this someone loves them.

As usual, we get the sense that the disciples are as lost as we would have been, back there, on that side of both Easter and Pentecost. John, by the time he writes his Gospel, does know about both the Resurrection and the gift of the Holy Spirit, because John's “Pentecost” actually occurs later on the same day as the Resurrection.

Here, John tells the story of Jesus saying goodbye to his followers, now that his “hour has come,” before he goes to his death. The longer Jesus goes on (and it is a very long farewell speech), the more anxious and perplexed the disciples are.

As Taylor writes, “The way he tells it, he is heading off to a family reunion with his father that no one else is invited to, and he is leaving them in charge while he is gone.” And even with Easter, and Pentecost, and centuries of faith between them and us, Taylor says, “from where we sit it has been so long that some of us wonder if we have not been orphaned after all.”

Verse 4:17 says “This Companion is the Spirit of Truth, whom the world can’t receive because it neither sees him nor recognizes him. You know him, because he lives with you and will be with you.” The world cannot understand this spirit of truth, because so much of what our material world and culture embraces is really illusion – competition for limited resources; winners and losers; a grab for things that are fleeting and empty as ways of being powerful, important, holding tightly to only what it can see and touch, hands and eyes, and fearful hearts seeking security. For many in this world, they do not recognize this spirit rooted in compassion and justice, the incarnations of the parting words of Jesus when he told his disciples, and US. “If you love me, you will keep my commandments.” Dianne Bergant explores the role of the Spirit in our lives as S/He “enables us to interpret the signs of the times in ways very different from the ways of the world. It is the Spirit who works through us for the transformation of the world.” The commandments that mattered to Jesus were those two about loving God and loving our neighbor. And, we might add, he expanded (by his words and deeds) our understanding of those commandments to include things like forgiveness, praying for our enemies, caring about the poor and the marginalized, and ordering our lives well, including our use of money--the thing we mostly don't want to talk about in church; none of this is easy! Jesus isn't making a conditional statement but instead is putting forth an obvious fact: when you love someone, really, really love someone, doing what is good and right comes so much more naturally and easily.

Jesus is speaking to a group and not to an individual, and preparing them for what is to come. Things are going to change, and change fast, and, Gail R. O'Day says, that will affect how the disciples will carry out Jesus' command, even

how they will show their love for him after he's gone, neither "by clinging to a cherished memory of him nor by retreating into their private experience of him," but by "doing his works (vv. 12-14) and by keeping his commandments (vv. 15-24)."

When the disciples (and, by extension, WE) walk the talk and "live what Jesus has taught them and demonstrated in his own life," O'Day writes, "then they will find themselves once again in his love."

In her wise and inspiring book, *Creativity and Divine Surprise: Finding the Place of Your Resurrection*, Rev. Karla Kincannon asserts that the two interwoven strands of our Divine DNA are Love and Creativity. So often, we narrowly assign “creativity” as being the domain of artists and children. But, if, in fact, we can understand that the source of creativity, and INSPIRATION, is the ADVOCATE, The COMPANION, who God breathes into each and every one of us, then to tap into that source, empowers us to be co-creators with God; to find new grace notes in our lives; and the curiosity about what it is that God is asking us – you and me – to do in the world. AND when we couple that power of the Spirit to create, to begin, to aspire to be and see and enact something MORE with the connection to a deep love for others, we are a force for justice and transformation in a world that has become fragmented, fearful, with deep longing for what is real; what heals; what makes us whole.

Barbara Brown Taylor brings the text right back to the heart of the message: "...and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them' (John 14:23). Not visit. Not pass through from time to time. Not send a postcard....John only uses the word 'home' twice in his gospel, both times around the supper table...."

Is it any wonder that our church home has a table at its center, not just architecturally but at the heart of our sacramental life together? This "permanent" home, Taylor writes, is "a giant heart of a place with room enough for everyone whom love unites. It is John's idea of heaven to move in with the God who has moved in with us...."

Does Olivet Christian Church, does the Disciples of Christ denomination, look like "a giant heart of a place with room enough for everyone whom love unites"? May Spiritus, Ruach, Sarayu, Prana, Pneuma, the HOLY SPIRIT make it so. Amen.

Benediction

Listen to the promise Jesus makes:

I will never abandon you as orphans—I will come to you.

Even though the world will not be able to see me, I will never vanish from your sight.

And since I live, you will also live.

Go in the knowledge that you do not go alone; the power and presence of God goes with you. Praise be to God!

Written by Christine Longhurst