

May 31, 2020 Sermon: Acts 2:1-21

A Time of New Birth

Hello everyone! May God bless you as we worship today!

And now, Let's take a moment to remember George Floyd, who lost his life because he could not breathe. A police officer held a knee, against his neck for about eight minutes. George Floyd stopped breathing.

I could not help but break down in tears when I heard him saying, 'Please I can't breathe ... I can't breathe, I am dying...Mama'

It also reminded me of Eric Garner.

In 2014, Garner also pleaded for life, his last words were... "I can't breathe," When he was choked by a police officer. He stopped breathing.

Minneapolis mayor Jacob Frey on Monday said, "**Being black in America should not be a death sentence.**"

Before this, I was already in distress after seeing the video of a black man in Central Park who asked a white woman to put her dog on a leash.

The woman then called the police with the accusation that "an African-American man is threatening me and my dog."

In February, Ahmaud Arbery, a black man in South Georgia, was chased and **fatally** shot by armed white residents while jogging.

Racism and police brutality have always existed, and it still exists.

Even as civilians, we can determine that in these cases, black people are being targeted as criminals in their everyday activities. And the hefty price they pay is their life.

In the cases of George Floyd and Ahmaud Arbery, video clips allowed the perpetrators to be charged with murder. Still this does not bring the victims back to life. Yes, it is something we can find some comfort in. But we want more than that. We want this to **STOP!**

We are living in a different world, one in which, people know where we are and what we do.

While racism and injustice still exist, it is much harder for people to hide their actions, right or wrong.

As we fight COVID-19, South Korean Foreign Minister appeared in many interviews and shared in detail how the country responded to the novel coronavirus spread. explosion.

She said massive testing was essential to prevent the worst situation from happening.

She emphasized three T's: Trace, test and treat.

Once you are exposed to the virus, you are traced, tested and treated.

People might think that is invasion of privacy, but people in South Korea are willing to be expose themselves to control and stop the spread of the disease.

Of course, their privacy is not completely exposed, but their whereabouts are being traced in order to be tested and be treated.

In fact, we might not feel like it, but even in the U.S., Google and Facebook always know where we are. If you have Siri on your phone or own an Alexa, you probably know they are always listening.

In the future, it might increasingly feel like **someone is always watching us**.

It is time for us to wake up and realize that we cannot live hiding behind the curtains.

Rather, we must keep our core values and learn to live by them at all times.

Now, let's think about the Pentecost and how we can all experience a time of new birth during the Pandemic.

In today's scriptures, small groups of Jews followed Jesus who had been killed like a criminal and resurrected. They gathered in one place at Pentecost. After the resurrected Jesus had ascended, they were left without a leader and powerless. No one expected this group of people to speak up about God. But miracles

happen. On the very first Pentecost, they prayed and prophesied. Pentecost is now a Jewish festival celebrated fifty days after Passover.

When Jesus ascended, the Holy Spirit descended upon them and gave the followers of Jesus the power to speak in different languages to communicate the “mighty works of God.”

Speaking in tongues, is more than a miracle. They are not just speaking in different languages, but they are delivering the message. They are speaking the truth.

The full miracle of Pentecost includes not just those who prayed and prophesied, but the devout Jews from every nation in Jerusalem who came to listen. The miracle of tongues involves both speaking and listening.

In verse 5, listening is just as prominent as speaking in this story.

When the Holy Spirit comes upon us, how do we respond? Do we respond to the Spirit by speaking and acting? Or do we respond to the Spirit by listening and receiving?

In the biblical world, the ability to dream dreams, have visions, and prophesy is reserved for a chosen few, and they are usually powerful men: Moses, Abraham, Joseph, David, and the prophets. Of the fifty-five prophets, the Hebrew scriptures identify only seven are women.

However, in today’s reading, as Peter quotes from the prophet Joel, we see that Joel’s prophecy has full inclusion: ;

He includes **sons and daughters, old and young, men and women, and even servants** (in some translations, slaves), as people who would have the abilities of a prophet, a spokesperson who conveys messages from God.

Here, Jesus’ followers are powerless and afraid because their future is uncertain.

The Pentecost is the fulfillment of Joel’s prophecy: the weak, the powerless, the ignored, and the excluded are the ones who speak for God. The disciples’ speaking and the crowd’s understanding at **Pentecost represent full inclusion**. It is a sign of the coming of the new age, when the prophetic voices will come from the powerless in society.

Today, how do we prepare ourselves to listen to the powerless in our communities?

We ask God to breathe on the powerless of our society to empower them to speak the truth.

And we ask God to breathe on His people, to give them the courage to seek and listen to the powerless.

We live in a world dominated by the voices of the powerful and rich, who use their power and money to influence how people get treated. This makes us unable to communicate with one another to work together for the common good.

As followers of Jesus, we sometimes feel insignificant and helpless and perhaps even powerless in sharing the good news of a compassionate and just God.

At times like these, we can learn from the miraculous Pentecost story, when a small group of powerless Jews becomes so influential that 3,000 people were baptized. (Acts 2:41.)

In every generation, Christians have used the technologies available to us to share the gospel. The early church leaders wrote down their stories for future generations.

When the printing press was invented, Christians used it to print copies of the Bible and other resources to be distributed and shared with many more. The voiceless began to find their voices in the printing era as well.

Now, with the digital media, we can learn to use these channels to empower the prophetic voices of those with less power in our society. YouTube offers the ability to share their voice with millions. Social media allows people to network globally.

When used faithfully, new technologies can allow us to hear and to share the experiences of the powerless, realizing a form of Pentecost.

We want to recognize Pentecost moments and use our technologies to network locally and globally to empower and amplify the voices of the powerless. We pray that their dreams, visions, and prophecies be heard by God's people.

We might be called to speak out when it is not our place or time to speak. In the 1960s in the United States, the marchers and participants who protested and broke unjust laws were told that their behaviors were inappropriate, not the right ways to make change, or even dangerous.

Today we recognize similar complaints about the recent movements that raise the voices of the powerless and oppressed. They include the “Black Lives Matters” and “Me Too” movements.

As on **Pentecost**, God’s Spirit empowers us to act in prophetic ways that may seem inappropriate to others.

The breath of God gives us the strength and courage to speak the truth even if others find it inappropriate. God breathes on us, in us, and through us so that we can carry it on.

Jesus ascends into heaven in front of his people, being taken up in the clouds.

Jesus anticipates his coming departure and prays for his followers.

We, as the followers of Jesus, want to experience miracles every day.

We ask God to give us the strength and courage to speak the truth.

In order for us to do that, we must experience new life in God.

May God bless us to be brave to speak the truth in today’s world. Black Lives Matter! Let them breathe!

God bless you all and may you stay safe and healthy until we meet physically. Sending you lots of love with this message. Let us pray.

Prayer: Holy Spirit, come upon us and help us discern when we should speak and when we should listen, so that your vision of the peaceable realm can be realized. Amen.