

[Deep breath] Try it. Feels good, doesn't it?

That's how I intended to start my sermon a couple weeks ago when Zoom went down canceling online church services around the world. And it was such a good sermon! I was going to teach (or review) how to do "breath prayers" – particularly helpful during this stressful time.

But it turns out that it was not to be. I thought about tweaking it today for the Feast of Pentecost, celebrating the breath of God come to us in the Holy Spirit. But that was not to be either.

Last Monday changed everything.

This past Monday was supposed to be a festive Memorial Day honoring those heroes of the armed forces who've given their lives for us all. But it wasn't the same as having a big parade down Main St with us in front of church giving out prayer cards to our fellow citizens. I'm thinking it was probably a quieter day for many of us.

But it turned out to be a momentous day for our country. On that day we crossed the grim milestone of 100,000 of our fellow Americans having died of COVID-19. That's more than *twice* the population of Wallingford having struggled to breathe, and ultimately taken their last breaths, from a single illness in three short months.

That same day, when we were supposed to be honoring our finest, police officers in Minneapolis, MN, pressed their body weight upon an unarmed, handcuffed, black man named George Floyd for 9 minutes as he gasped, "I can't breathe" . . . until he could breathe no more.

We know that he is not the first unarmed African American gentleman to die in similar circumstances. He's not even the first whose last words to police officers were,

"I can't breathe."

This violent death of yet another black man comes in the midst of the reality that of those 100,000 deaths from COVID-19, a disproportionate number were people of color.

It's been a sobering week in our country during what has been a harrowing spring for much of the world.

And it is this week that brings us to this Day of Pentecost, the grand finale of Eastertide when we celebrate that God in Christ is faithful. God in Christ sending the gift of the Holy Spirit, the divine breath in us. The divine breath in all of God's creatures, comforting them, advocating for them, just as Jesus promised.

In happier times, we celebrate this day as the "birthday of the Church." Some parishes have birthday cakes. I recall red balloons and hand-made noisemakers with red crepe paper streamers waved by our children. And baptisms – lots of baptisms.

No reflection on today's handful of Gospel readers, but I did miss hearing it in a beautiful cacophony of 10 or so voices echoing what must have been the chaotic vibrancy of the original Pentecost. I've actually had folks come up to me after a raucous Pentecost at St Paul's and say, "I get it. I felt like I was there on that first Christian Pentecost."

I guess that's one of the many things I'm mourning these days.

But I wonder if this year our Pentecost isn't actually *more* like that first one. They were there, together, as we read in Acts, because their friend Jesus, a dark-skinned man, had been unjustly killed by the state. I imagine there were a range of feelings among them from shock to grief, despair to rage. Who could blame them?

And even though Jesus had promised to send the Spirit, wonder if they knew at first what hit them as that mighty wind filled the house where they gathered.

But then they began to speak in other languages as the Spirit gave them the ability.

The Spirit brought them together in unity from the diversity of the world as they knew it. They came together -- listening to one another, understanding one another -- and they knew it was of God. They knew it was holy.

And then Peter was inspired to preach his first sermon.

Only fifty days earlier, Peter,

by his silence, his quiet refusal to speak up for Jesus, had been complicit with the system that crucified Jesus.

But now, by the power of the Spirit, Peter was transformed.

He became who Jesus always knew he could be, who Jesus *needed* him to be.

Peter was healed by the Spirit to bring its healing to others.

But it wasn't Peter alone.

The whole community, women and men alike, that the Spirit formed that day came together and "turned the known world upside down." (Hymn 507, vs 4)

We're here today because they received the Spirit then.

What are we here for if not to turn the world as we know it upside down?

Yes, we need to be healed to bring healing to this world God so loves.

We need to be healed by the cleansing power of the Spirit of our complicity in a sinful system from which many of us benefit for no other reason than having been born white.

I know most of you watching now, and I love you.

I know you don't consider yourselves racist, nor do I.

But we've lived most of our lives in a culture of white supremacy -- not that we meant harm, but we took it for granted.

I took it for granted that I didn't need to have "the talk" about safety with my son that my sisters of color must have with theirs.

The one and only time my son ever encountered a police officer was when he was peacefully walking at night with a black friend.

I was flabbergasted; the other boy's mother was not.

What's going through her mind this week as she sees what happened to George Floyd, as so many others before him?

It's not enough for us not to be racist, we must become actively anti-racist.

I've said before that I believe that dismantling white supremacy

is one of the most urgent callings of our time.
 I believe it is a holy calling, that it is of God.
 I believe that's where the Spirit is calling us today –
 to overcome the worldly things that divide us,
 and to come together as one before God.

That's what the Spirit did on that first Christian Pentecost.
 That's literally what we celebrate today.
 Now how do we *live it* every day?

With prayer of course.
 Confessing and asking for healing from the sin of white supremacy.
 Educating ourselves. Listening to others – others different than ourselves.
 Taking action as we are called.
 Realizing that our citizenship and right to vote are a gift and a responsibility.
 Working the Baptismal Covenant we're about to profess.
 Working our Way of Love words as disciples of Jesus Christ.

It's unusual for me, frankly,
 but I was so troubled by all this that that I couldn't sleep Friday night.
 Oh foolish me, I got up and started scrolling through Twitter,
 which you'd think was about the worst thing I could do.
 But then I found this prayer,
 posted by the Episcopal group Earth & Altar.*
 It helped me find the rest I needed that night,
 rest I hope will spur me on to more prayer – and action:

*Lord God, whose ear is always inclined to hear the cries of the afflicted and whose arm is mighty to save them from their oppressors; give strength and courage to all those who stand against the demonic power of white supremacy. Give comfort to all who mourn the lives it has taken, especially for George Floyd, and turn the hearts of those whose words and actions participate in it {and benefit from it}, that true repentance may lead to just reconciliation, and true justice may lead to lasting peace; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.***

*{ } phrase added to prayer

