

The Gifts of the Spirit

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1 Corinthians 12:4-13; Acts 2:1-4
Lewinsville Presbyterian Church

May 31, 2020 – Pentecost Sunday

It has been a painful week in our land. We have passed the awful number of 100,000 people who have died in the United States from COVID-19. Tomorrow, June 1, a variety of religious traditions and civic groups will observe a National Day of Mourning and Lament – Christian, Jewish, Muslim, and others – to mourn these losses, to remember their names, and to grieve. While COVID-19 has ravaged people of all ages and all races, the victims have been disproportionately among the elderly and among communities of color.

This week has also seen the city of Minneapolis, and others, in crisis following the killing of George Floyd, an unarmed African American who died under the knee of a police officer. It can be easy for some of us to wish that these situations would just go away and that we could talk about something else, but that in itself may be a sign of our privilege, because for our neighbors who are people of color, these situations don't just go away. I would suggest that those of us who are white have a particular responsibility to lean into these conversations, to stand with and listen to the voices of our neighbors who are people of color. I know that these conversations are not always comfortable, but I deeply believe that healing can begin to come from them. This is why I believe that the work of groups like CURE – Clergy United for Racial Empathy which Lewinsville has been part of – is so important and necessary. We have much work to do.

And what we learn from Jesus is that Jesus does not walk away from those who are in pain, does not walk away from difficult situations and conversations. He walks *towards* them and *into* them with the healing grace of God, grace that is present with the pain, that stays with the pain, sits with the pain, holds our pain until it is healed. And he invites his church to follow him and to do the same.

Today is also Pentecost Sunday and the day of Confirmation for Andrew French, Brett Kohler, and Leah Sexton, the day when we celebrate the gifts that the Holy Spirit has given to them already, and will give to them in the future - gifts of faith, gifts of resilience, gifts of leadership. Andrew, Brett, and Leah are stepping into active membership in the Presbyterian Church, and they will be helping to lead us as a church, as we discern how to be faithful in our time and in this place, joining with us in responding to the human needs around us.

When we think of what it means for the Spirit to be poured out on the church during a painful, turbulent time like the times that we are living through, we may assume that the Spirit does not pour forth like some kind of magic potion that magically makes all of our problems go

away. While that might be nice, it would not require much of us, and in any case, the Christian faith is not about magic or wishful thinking. The Christian faith is about the transformative power of God's grace, which touches and interacts with our pain, heals it, and turns it to something new and powerful.

I imagine that the Spirit is being poured forth *upon* us and our situation, and that the Spirit is being poured forth *through* us and our situation. When the Spirit is poured forth *upon* us, in our pain and turbulence, we may imagine that the Spirit comes as a gift, to provide calm, hope, steadiness, and clarity of vision for the future. The gifts of the Spirit enable us to see more clearly, in the midst of turbulence, in the midst of anger, in the midst of hurt, in the midst of grief. The Spirit gives us grace to express those things, to weep our tears, to give voice to our pain and our anger and our grief. The Spirit is deeply connected to the wind and connected to our breath, which is particularly poignant this week, as George Floyd's last words were, "I can't breathe." The Spirit, poured forth upon us, gives us breath when we can't seem to find it for ourselves, gives us vision when we can't seem to find it for ourselves, and gives us hope when we can't seem to find it for ourselves.

But the Spirit also pours forth *through* us and through each other. John 3 says that the Spirit-wind blows where it chooses, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. We never know where the voice of the Spirit is going to come from, and it routinely comes from where we least expect it. The gifts of the Spirit can pour forth from within a difficult situation, which is one more reason why we need not avoid difficult situations, because if we do, we may miss the gifts that those difficult situations have to give us. The Spirit pours forth from inside our most difficult situations, healing them from the inside out, giving room – as our denomination's Brief Statement of Faith says – for "voices long silenced" and enabling difficult conversations to take place, conversations across our polarized differences, conversations that seek to build up the common good, putting the well-being of the least and the last and the lost at the center.

Friends, as we move into this Pentecost season, what do you sense that God's Spirit is doing in our land at this time? What gifts do you sense that God's Spirit is giving *you* at this time, to equip and enable you to provide leadership during this time? Where do you sense God's Spirit pouring forth around you and beyond you? To God and to God alone, be all the glory, now and forever. Amen.