

Day of Pentecost, May 20, 2018

Acts 2:1-21; Psalm 104:25-35, 37; Romans 8:22-27; John 15:26-27; 16:4b-15

I propose to show that perhaps like me, you have found that you have locked yourself from the dangers of the world as did Jesus' disciples in our story from the Book of Acts, until the power of God's love in the Spirit empowered you to breathe deeply in God's love, so you may feel it and risk the dangers of life to share God's love with those who need it.

Today is the Day of Pentecost, the day when according to Luke, the author of the Book of Acts wrote that the disciples who were hiding in the upper room was filled with the Spirit of God and went out to proclaim the Good News of Jesus the Christ, crucified, risen and ascended. Breathe in. Breathe out.

This week I had a couple of experiences which made me wonder if I was living like the disciples who were hiding in the upper room after Jesus was crucified. On Thursday, I went to the Congregational Church of San Mateo at the invitation of the Rev. Penny Nixon, Senior Pastor. She had organized a Summit on Immigration along with Faith in Action, a community organizing group.

I heard two stories of immigrants. A man shared a story of how his apartment complex was having trouble with plumbing and electricity. The tenants went to the landlord with no response. They also had trouble with an infestation of bed bugs, and his child was so bitten that he was ashamed to go to school. On top of this the rents kept increasing. They were afraid to complain, because among the residents were undocumented people. A community organizer from Faith in Action brought the issue to a council member of the City of San Mateo. They decided to hold a vigil to protest the poor treatment they were receiving. Due to the publicity, the landlord did the right thing and made the needed repairs.

Another incident was about another immigrant family. The apartment in which they were living had a fire, and they could no longer live there. They went to the landlord and wanted to get their \$5000 deposit back so they could find another place to live. But this time the landlord threatened to bring them to ICE if they took legal action. Faith in Action became involved and helped bring a cause of action to small claims court. With the support of others this immigrant family was able to seek justice, and the judge ruled in their favor.

My response was why didn't I hear about these stories happening in San Mateo before? It is right next door to Foster City. And I thought to myself, perhaps I am living in the comfort of Foster City, or in my own safe community, and don't really bother myself to know about what is happening to these vulnerable neighbors.

As I thought to myself, perhaps I watch too much cable new television. I know perhaps more about what journalists have to say about what is happening in the country, and develop tunnel vision. Shouldn't I know more about what is happening in the community?

Aren't we all like this? We want to live in safe and comfortable communities. We may avoid the places and people we perceive to be dangerous. But isn't this a bit like the disciples hiding behind closed doors in the upper room.

On Tuesday, my wife, the Rev. Karen Swanson arrived in the Virgin Islands to serve as a missionary supply priest to provide respite care to the clergy there, in this case Bishop Ambrose Gumbs who in addition to serving as the diocesan bishop, also cares for two congregations on the island of St. Thomas. They are recovering from last year's hurricanes. When she applied to go there, I thought to myself that she wanted to share her love with the people there as a priest, even though she is now retired, and has been licensed as a Marriage and Family Therapist. I thought to myself, she must be a bit crazy. She wanted an adventure and opportunity to serve. But she was a bit crazy with the idea of sharing God's love.

She has met many people who are humble, kind and intelligent. She does not look like them as most of them are of African Caribbean ancestry. They are thinking about how to recover and rebuild from the hurricanes. But the apartment she is living in has no windows but has air conditioning, and is not the comfortable and well-manicured environment of Foster City. She has no Wi-Fi in her building and must go to the Diocesan Office to access the internet. She still feels like a stranger and a bit vulnerable, so at night fall she goes to her apartment and locks the doors. But it struck me how she was a bit afraid of the new place at night. The other day there was an arrest down the street.

I thought we all have a tendency to see life through our own experience. It is difficult for us to empathize with others who live in more challenging conditions if we never know about them and stay isolated in the safe communities where we want to live.

I thought to myself that Karen is crazy because she wants to share God's love, and is willing to both inconvenience herself and live with a bit of danger to do so.

On Saturday, how many of you watched the Royal Wedding? Did you hear Bishop Michael Curry's sermon. His theme was "Love is powerful, and it can change the world." The love he spoke about is none other than God's own love, for according to 1 John, 'God is love.'

I myself did not watch the Royal Wedding live, but I did see Bishop Curry preach on a link on the computer. What I saw was Bishop Curry preaching, and the camera panning the congregation catching the Queen and her husband, and the other royals, Meghan Markle's mother, and the guests. The Royals were mostly keeping a stiff upper lip. Some of the younger people were smiling and their eyes were twinkling. And in the background I could hear laughter from the crowd outside watching the ceremony on a large screen.

What was most poignant for me was when Bishop Curry talked about how the power of love was able to keep African slaves hopeful by singing the spiritual, "There is a balm in Gilead." The love which brought together Harry and Meghan together is deeply grounded in God's love. There sitting together were the descendants of the royalty that authorized the slave trade and descendants of slaves. The scene fulfilled in a way today's Collect for the Day, "you opened the way of eternal life to every race and nation by the promised gift of your Holy Spirit."

Bishop Curry said God's love is able to change the world. Imagine if all our relationships were governed by God's redemptive love. There would be no more war or want. So in short, we must "feel the love" so we can "share the love."

Yesterday afternoon I attended a worship service, "A Celebration of Life" for the Rev. Dr. Fran Toy, a friend and seminary classmate. She had been living with cancer for a long time, and has finally decided not to take any more treatments. She was the first woman of Asian ancestry to be ordained an Episcopal priest. (Florence Li Tim-Oi is the first woman of Asian ancestry to be ordained a priest in the Anglican Communion.) Instead of a sermon, there were several reflections shared by friends and family. Each shared how Fran's love for them affected their life. One who shared, the Rev. Polly Hilsabeck used the metaphor, "the garden that is Fran Toy." Polly came for the day from North Carolina. Others came from Hong Kong, New York and Toronto and other places. What they had in common was how Fran cared for them and listened to them, and was often at the milestone events of their lives.

Fran's Celebration of Life was a testimony to how our lives can be "a garden" of God's love. Imagine our lives as a garden in which we care for the relationships of our lives by providing care to the vulnerable and hurting, creating a safe place for intimate conversations, weeding out bitterness, celebrating with one another are undergirded by prayer.

But if we are to do so, we must both feel the love, before we can share it. Breathe in deeply God's love for you and for the world. Take a risk to go beyond the safe confines of your life, so you may share your love with others, as a sign of breathing out God's love.

Amen.

The Collect

Almighty God, on this day you opened the way of eternal life to every race and nation by the promised gift of your Holy Spirit: Shed abroad this gift throughout the world by the preaching of the Gospel, that it may reach to the ends of the earth; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

The First Lesson

Acts 2:1-21

When the day of Pentecost had come, the disciples were all together in one place. And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.

Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each. Amazed and astonished, they asked, "Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language? Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabs-- in our own languages we hear them speaking about God's deeds of power." All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, "What does this mean?" But others sneered and said, "They are filled with new wine."

But Peter, standing with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed them, "Men of Judea and all who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and listen to what I say. Indeed, these are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only nine o'clock in the morning. No, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel:

‘In the last days it will be, God declares,
that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh,
and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,
and your young men shall see visions,
and your old men shall dream dreams.
Even upon my slaves, both men and women,
in those days I will pour out my Spirit;
and they shall prophesy.
And I will show portents in the heaven above
and signs on the earth below,
blood, and fire, and smoky mist.
The sun shall be turned to darkness
and the moon to blood,
before the coming of the Lord's great and glorious day.
Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.' "

The Response

Psalm 104:25-35, 37

Benedic, anima mea

- 25 O LORD, how manifold are your works! *
in wisdom you have made them all;
the earth is full of your creatures.
- 26 Yonder is the great and wide sea
with its living things too many to number, *
creatures both small and great.
- 27 There move the ships,
and there is that Leviathan, *
which you have made for the sport of it.
- 28 All of them look to you *
to give them their food in due season.
- 29 You give it to them; they gather it; *
you open your hand, and they are filled with good things.
- 30 You hide your face, and they are terrified; *
you take away their breath,
and they die and return to their dust.
- 31 You send forth your Spirit, and they are created; *
and so you renew the face of the earth.

32 May the glory of the LORD endure for ever; *
may the LORD rejoice in all his works.

33 He looks at the earth and it trembles; *
he touches the mountains and they smoke.

34 I will sing to the LORD as long as I live; *
I will praise my God while I have my being.

35 May these words of mine please him; *
I will rejoice in the LORD.

37 Bless the LORD, O my soul. *
Hallelujah!

The New Testament

Romans 8:22-27

We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies. For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.

Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words. And God, who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.

The Gospel

John 15:26-27; 16:4b-15

Jesus said to his disciples, "When the Advocate comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who comes from the Father, he will testify on my behalf. You also are to testify because you have been with me from the beginning.

"I did not say these things to you from the beginning, because I was with you. But now I am going to him who sent me; yet none of you asks me, 'Where are you going?' But because I have said these things to you, sorrow has filled your hearts. Nevertheless I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Advocate will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you. And when he comes, he will prove the world wrong about sin and righteousness and judgment: about sin, because they do not believe in me; about righteousness, because I am going to the Father and you will see me no longer; about judgment, because the ruler of this world has been condemned.

"I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own, but will speak whatever he hears, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me,

because he will take what is mine and declare it to you. All that the Father has is mine. For this reason I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you.

In preparation for this coming Sunday's worship, please pray this coming Sunday's Collect of the Day and read and reflect on the lessons assigned as printed below

The First Sunday after Pentecost, May 27, 2018,
Isaiah 6:1-8; Psalm 29; Romans 8:12-17; John 3:1-17

The Collect

Almighty and everlasting God, you have given to us your servants grace, by the confession of a true faith, to acknowledge the glory of the eternal Trinity, and in the power of your divine Majesty to worship the Unity: Keep us steadfast in this faith and worship, and bring us at last to see you in your one and eternal glory, O Father; who with the Son and the Holy Spirit live and reign, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

Old Testament

Isaiah 6:1-8

In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lofty; and the hem of his robe filled the temple. Seraphs were in attendance above him; each had six wings: with two they covered their faces, and with two they covered their feet, and with two they flew. And one called to another and said:

“Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts;
the whole earth is full of his glory.”

The pivots on the thresholds shook at the voices of those who called, and the house filled with smoke. And I said: “Woe is me! I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips; yet my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts!”

Then one of the seraphs flew to me, holding a live coal that had been taken from the altar with a pair of tongs. The seraph touched my mouth with it and said: “Now that this has touched your lips, your guilt has departed and your sin is blotted out.” Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, “Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?” And I said, “Here am I; send me!”

The Response

Psalm 29

Afferte Domino

1 Ascribe to the LORD, you gods, *
ascribe to the LORD glory and strength.

- 2 Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his Name; *
 worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness.
- 3 The voice of the LORD is upon the waters;
 the God of glory thunders; *
 the LORD is upon the mighty waters.
- 4 The voice of the LORD is a powerful voice; *
 the voice of the LORD is a voice of splendor.
- 5 The voice of the LORD breaks the cedar trees; *
 the LORD breaks the cedars of Lebanon;
- 6 He makes Lebanon skip like a calf, *
 and Mount Hermon like a young wild ox.
- 7 The voice of the LORD splits the flames of fire;
 the voice of the LORD shakes the wilderness; *
 the LORD shakes the wilderness of Kadesh.
- 8 The voice of the LORD makes the oak trees writhe *
 and strips the forests bare.
- 9 And in the temple of the LORD *
 all are crying, "Glory!"
- 10 The LORD sits enthroned above the flood; *
 the LORD sits enthroned as King for evermore.
- 11 The LORD shall give strength to his people; *
 the LORD shall give his people the blessing of peace.

The Epistle

Romans 8:12-17

So then, brothers and sisters, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh-- for if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, "Abba! Father!" it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ-- if, in fact, we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him.

The Gospel

John 3:1-17

There was a Pharisee named Nicodemus, a leader of the Jews. He came to Jesus by night and said to him, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God; for no one can do these signs that you do apart from the presence of God." Jesus answered him, "Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above." Nicodemus said to him, "How can anyone be born after having grown old? Can one enter a second time into the mother's womb and be born?" Jesus answered, "Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit. What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the

Spirit is spirit. Do not be astonished that I said to you, 'You must be born from above.' The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit." Nicodemus said to him, "How can these things be?" Jesus answered him, "Are you a teacher of Israel, and yet you do not understand these things?"

"Very truly, I tell you, we speak of what we know and testify to what we have seen; yet you do not receive our testimony. If I have told you about earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you about heavenly things? No one has ascended into heaven except the one who descended from heaven, the Son of Man. And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.

"For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.

"Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.