

We've come to the end of the Easter season. And so, we leave behind the 50 days of Pascha and our Easter contemplation of the mystagogy; seeking to interpret the mystery that we never *solve*, but can only *enter into* with awe and reverence.

In the spiraling liturgical movement that carries us closer to God and deeper in faith, we will come back to the mystagogy. By the time that the next Pascha season comes, we will have practiced, prayed and pondered for another year.

But Pentecost completes more than a calendar cycle. The seven solemn and intense weeks from Easter to Pentecost are a crucial part of our lifelong learning about how to be the church in the world. We don't simply *belong* to the church, we *are* the church. Christ is the head and all baptized people are members of the Body through which the Holy Spirit works. Together, the church is the eyes and hands of Christ alive in the world today.

So, Pentecost is a birthday of sorts for the church and you can hear in the reading from Acts that there is something of a party atmosphere going on. Paul's letter to the Corinthians describes the lavish and varied gifts that the Holy Spirit is giving away. In the Gospel, John's resurrected Jesus comes among the disciples and gives them gift of the peace of Christ and the Holy Spirit.

But to really set the stage for this party, there's a missed opportunity to catch the spirit of joy in these readings. In the NRSV translation of Psalm 104 that we just prayed, the third line reads: "There move the ships, and there is that Leviathan, which you have made for the sport of it."

In Hebrew mythology, the Leviathan was a ferocious serpentine beast that ruled the chaos of the sea. Brief references to Leviathan show up here and there, but the book of Job gives us details about Leviathan. In describing his relationship to creation, God challenges Job by asking: "Will you *play with it* [Leviathan, that is] Will you play with it as with a bird, or will you put it on leash for your girls?"

In Hebrew, Psalm 104 uses exactly the same words about the beast. So, the Grail translation directly from the Hebrew reads: "There is the sea, vast and wide, with its moving swarms past counting, living things great

and small. The ships are moving there and the monsters you made *to play with.*”

God takes delight, do you see, even in this wild sea-beast, this creature of chaos. Leviathan is God’s rubber ducky! God opens wide a hand and all of God’s creatures they have their fill of good things; and filled with more than daily sustenance.

“You send forth your Spirit,” the psalm goes on, “they are created and so you renew the face of the earth.” The psalmist here is playing on the first creation story in Genesis when “...the earth was unformed and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep; and the spirit of God hovered over the face of the waters.”

The spirit of God, in Hebrew, the “ruach Elohim,” not only sustains and renews creation from generation to generation. The “ruach Elohim” also means “the breath of God.” In the Genesis story, God literally inspires – *breathes* the breath of life *into* the nostrils of the earthling, who then becomes a living soul.

There’s a connection between God creating the first human being and John’s Jesus giving the Holy Spirit to the disciples. When the resurrected Jesus came into the room to the disciples through the locked door, Jesus did not breathe *on* the disciples. Jesus breathed *into* them. John chose to use the same verb from Genesis; the verb used in the book of Ezekiel when God told the prophet to command the ruach – the winds, spirit or breath – to “*breathe into* these slain, that they may live.”

John’s Jesus breathed *into* the disciples and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit.” And they became new creatures.

Now, you may have noticed that Luke’s version of the coming of the Spirit in Acts is quite different from John’s. And both those stories seem to differ from the way the psalmist presented the Spirit. In Paul’s letter to the Corinthians, the Spirit seems to come to different people in different ways. We can get ourselves wrapped around the axle trying to nail down exact details of when, where and how.

Fortunately, our Jewish cousins can help. Most Hasidic Jews see God always blessing, reforming and revitalizing life with a Spirit that constantly flows within and around all of God’s creations. They might say that God’s creative Spirit doesn’t show up in a one-time event, but is a continuous process going on in this moment. And in this moment. And in

this. Or maybe for God, there is only one moment in which all creating is happening, has happened and will happen.

These perspectives from our Hasidic cousins can shed light on our own theology: God's Holy Spirit *is* God; God blessing all of creation and specifically human communities. God's Holy Spirit is God; God within us individually and around us collectively breathing our prayers. God's Holy Spirit is God *breathing* most intimately within each of us.

In these ways, God nurtures, nudges and challenges our awareness of the Divine Presence in all of creation and every person we encounter. Through these avenues, God guides us and prompts us to wake up to who we are as children of God.

God's on-going act of creating is blossoming with exuberance and abundance; it is blissfully liberating and life-giving. God creates, sees what is created and says, "it is good." With one exception. And *only* one. God looked at Adama, the first mud-creature, and said, "It is not good that the earthling is alone."

From the beginning, we were created to be in community. Even Jesus cannot bear to be apart from the people he loves. In contrast to the Synoptic Gospels, John's Jesus never sends disciples out until he has given his followers another companion. Only after breathing God's breath and Holy Spirit into them, does Jesus send his friends out to serve creation. Without the breath of God in us, we simply cannot do our part in God's restoration of creation to right relationship.

Restoration of relationships through the forgiveness of sins is central to our role in God's work. For John's Jesus, sin is not a list of banned behaviors or a measurement of moral correctness. Sin is anything that replaces or damages our relationship with God; anything that erodes, discourages or prevents trust in God.

And pride, *self-conceit*, as C.S. Lewis argued, may be the initiating center of our sin and evil. "Unchastity, anger, greed, drunkenness, and all that," Lewis wrote, "are mere fleabites in comparison." The good people of Corinth, as an example, have started arguing over whose spiritual gifts are more important. In other words, these holy people are beginning to sin.

They are allowing their self-importance to breed polarization, division and smugness. But what the community needs is for them to come together; to serve. Not despite their differences, but because in humility

their differences make them stronger. Paul's letter reminds all God's children that we have access to all God's gifts *only* when we are one body, one community.

Paul is not promoting uniformity of behavior, but solidarity in love. A living relationship with God is what unites us. One way God fulfills the work of redemption is by exhaling the breath of God's love into the world *through each of us*. And if God created the Leviathan to be a rubber ducky for the pure joy of it, how much more then must God smile at the gifts within even the most beastly aspects of our own personalities.

No one here is unloved, unnecessary or ungifted.

Pentecost is a pivot point. For the 50 days of Pascha, we engaged the mystery of the Risen Christ. Today, we recognize the other companion, the breath of God, who lives in us, strengthens us and makes us holy. Then we turn our attention toward serving God's creation by giving away the love that God endlessly pours into us.

We look for gifts of the Spirit within each other; gifts large and small. We nurture whatever fosters loving unity and collective well-being. Luke's story highlighted speaking in exotic tongues, but today, learning to listen may be the gift most needed.

Listening is crucial to practicing the forgiveness of sins; forgiveness, that is, of acts that separate us from God and from each other in Christ. And when we hear the need, forgiveness of sins against ourselves.

We are – all of us – forgiven sinners, in whom God takes playful joy. In that light, let me give you this from a Benedictine monk who prayed:

“Merciful God,
I have not judged today or lied;
I have not spoken harshly or been unkind;
I have not been selfish or caused anyone to suffer today.
But please stay close,
Because soon I must get out of bed.”

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