

What a pleasure and a blessing it has been to be with you all for the last few weeks. It has felt so familiar to be reconnected with Trinity, seeing old friends, and also meeting new ones, that it feels like no time has been lost since we began to worship just a few weeks ago. And, amazingly, so much has happened in just these last few weeks-new grandchildren, a new stay at home order, new diagnoses, some loss, and a lot of life, in just a short amount of time. This year, like the last one, continues to evolve into a year unlike any other. Our present and the uncertain future remains unlike anything we could have hoped for, planned for, and expected, even as we find ourselves still early in 2021. And yet again, in the time since we last gathered, the world has dramatically shifted, groaning now with the pain not just of coronavirus, but also with the long unaddressed pains of racism and violence around the world. Here in Mexico, we are growing weary of a pandemic that seems like it will never end, even as vaccines roll out slowly but surely, and we fear that things may get worse before it gets better, both in terms of health and the economy. We sense the tension is growing, that people are being stretched to their limits and their capacity for staying home has run thin. Last year, a colleague of mine joked about how we hoped 2020 would be the year of clarity and perfect vision. The ironic reality is that the clarity and truth that was revealed was different than what we hoped for, but perhaps it's what we needed, and still need, to see.

Pentecost is still a few weeks away, but because of Coronavirus I have been thinking a lot about breath this whole year-the breath that is so critical to life, and the breath of the Holy Spirit that breaths life and gives form to the church of which we are still a part. The church, as we know so well having recently celebrated Easter, always holds both death and life in

tension with one another. For the church to be born, Jesus must die. And through resurrection and the Holy Spirit, something new and holy is born out of what looked like only tragedy. It is the wind of the spirit, the Hebrew ruah and the Greek pneuma, that breathed life into creation at the beginning of time and also breathed the spirit of life into the church and all year I have been thinking about the nature of breath. Breath, the source of life and the sustainer of life-is so precious and yet in so much danger in the world right now-in the lungs fighting against coronavirus and in the last breaths of George Floyd, the man who was murdered by police in Minneapolis last year, who pleaded “please, I can’t breathe.”

One of the texts I continually return to is 1 Kings 19, in which Elijah, fearful for his life, escapes to the wilderness in search of safety and direction. The Lord tells Elijah to go out and stand on the mountain for the Lord is about to pass by. A strong wind that breaks mountains and rocks passes by, then an earthquake shakes the ground violently, and then a fire ravages the land, but God, who was usually associated with these dramatic events, is not found in any of them. Immediately afterwards, there is a sound of sheer silence, and only then does God speak: “What are you doing here, Elijah?” Over the past year we have been challenged to see the presence of God in that sheer silence as well-in our confinement, our isolation, our stillness, our powerlessness, our waiting for the Lord to pass by and tell us what to do in this season of waiting and uncertainty. Without all the chaos, the noise, the busyness, the full schedules, the distractions, we have been forced to dwell in that space too, just us and God. And hopefully, in those moments of stillness and silence-perhaps not always welcome moments-

we have encountered this last year, God has asked us that question too, “What are you doing here? In this time, on this earth? This question, which I hope we have listened to, is an invitation to turn inward and reflect, study, discern, rest, pray, repent, and ask for God’s continued guidance. God speaks to us in the silence.

And yet, we also see each year on Pentecost that God is also found in “violent wind” and “tongues of fire.” The confusion, wonders, signs, and drama of Pentecost transformed people and sent them out into the world to BE church. God is in the midst of the fires, the tornados, the storms and the chaos, because that is where the holy spirit is already working. Of course, God is everywhere, in silence and in chaos. Searching for God in the silence and following the holy spirit into the chaos may seem contradictory and incompatible. But these two distinct invitations reveal to us something of the nature of God and also about the rhythm of life as a disciple of Jesus. What are human beings, we heard the psalmist say last week, that God art mindful of them? God cares for us and seeks us out individually, personally, intimately, and God cares for the common good, the life and well-being of the world. And those places are where God calls us to be present and active, too. The internal spiritual work must lead us out into the world, to be the hands and feet of Jesus. These practices must nourish each other. Over the last year, I have been filled with a holy rage at what is happening in my country. I felt a profound, pent up energy and urgency to escape my confinement and join in the massive protest movements in my country and here in Mexico. To speak out against racism, to condemn the sin of white supremacy, to speak out against gun violence, to condemn violence against women, to act, to engage, and to do.

Overwhelmed by the constant news, my social media feed, and the urgency of all the many calls to act, I became anxious, overwhelmed by the world's need, and it led me to feel powerless and confused about what to do. A few nights ago, I took a break, from the worry, the anxiety, the urgency, to take a walk. I watched my daughters run and play outside, I felt the wind on my skin and took in the silent beauty of the sunset, everything calm and quiet outside due to the pandemic. Only in that stillness was God able to give shape and guidance to the chaos of my thoughts. And I was reminded, yet again, how we must slow down, nourish our spirit and give space for God's voice so that we go out into the world not just with holy rage, but with assurance, hope, and love, knowing that God is the one leading out to serve the needs of the world.

In Matthew 28 we read about the commissioning of the disciples. Even though some of the disciples are still filled with doubt, Jesus still commissions them to make disciples of all nations, to go out and baptize people and teach people just as Jesus taught them. I think this invitation still stands for us as well, no matter how much doubt we may hold at various times in our lives. But what does it mean to be a disciple? The root of the Greek word for disciple, *mathetes*, can be translated as student, a learner, a follower of Jesus who was willing to both learn from the doctrines of Scripture AND apply it to the lifestyle that they lived. Both a believer and a follower of Jesus. The original disciples were so transformed by what they witnessed in Jesus' life that they continued to follow his example even though they didn't always understand what the gospel meant. Much like them, we are called to be learners, to continue

studying and learning from Scripture, and to go out and live our lives doing what God calls us to do. Teaching and baptizing yes, and embracing the lifestyle of Jesus, who fed the hungry, clothed the naked, visited the imprisoned, healed the sick, and fought for justice, dignity, and peace for a chaotic and noisy world. The life of a disciple calls us to discern how to move back and forth between that silent, reflective place- letting God shape our heart, our spirit, our beliefs, and the exterior world, where we are called to become the church and serve the world God loves with our actions and lives. The two practices must continually nourish and inform each other.

So, as we look towards the remainder of quarantine, however long it may last and however many times we may have to return to it, let us seek wisdom from whatever remaining stillness and quiet we may have, asking God again to help us with that question, “Why are you here?” so that when the time comes, we can go out into the already groaning and raging world around us with clarity and assurance on how God is calling you to be his disciple in this unique and challenging time. Let us prepare ourselves well, because coronavirus and the social movements rising up around are giving us renewed clarity and truth about the state of the world- full of pain, suffering and lies the world wants us to believe about the value of certain people’s lives. It will take a faithful, compassionate, and courageous response for us to remake the world in God’s image. Last spring, I read a beautiful article about a local hospital here in Mexico City called Hospital Juarez, who has been on the front lines of the fight against Covid. And I imagine the article could reflect the battle of hospitals across Canada and the world. They interviewed laundry washers, aids, janitors, nurses, doctors. What struck me was how they spoke of the intensive care units

full of covid patients, almost entirely full of unconscious patients on ventilators. They spoke of how the silence and the stillness hides the true chaos of the situation-in which the entire staff is actively engaged in a dramatic fight for these patients' lives. Connected to a massive oxygen system, the machines literally breath and sustain the life of the patients so they can fight for their lives. One of the medics they interviewed talked about all of the conflicting feelings. She spoke of fear, of anxiety, of exhaustion, but the predominant feeling was pride: a pride in serving, a pride in accompanying patients in their isolation, pride to be part of the effort to heal, and to rise to this challenge, helping with the gifts and the skills that her career and training has uniquely prepared her to offer during this time. So, what are you doing here? What good can come of this time for you...and the silence and chaos that it holds? Like this medic, and the armies of hospital staff collectively breathing life into patients in need, we, too, must join the winds of Pentecost, breathing life and spirit into an aching world that robs many of life and dignity. May we go fully aware of the challenge ahead of it, but with the attitude of this nurse-with energy and pride to use our gifts and skills for the good of God's beloved creation.