

"Kissing Jesus" (Pentecost, 4June17)
John20:19-23; Psalm104:24-34,35b; Acts2:1-21;
1Corinthians12:3b-13

Perhaps you've noticed I occasionally get around to pairing titles with sermons. If you've noticed that, you may also be wondering about this one, perhaps whether it pairs with the ignominious category of Christian rock praise songs disparagingly referred to as "Jesus is my boyfriend" songs. They come with lyrics like: *In the secret, in the quiet place...I want to touch you, I want to see your face, I want to know you more.* With such over-the-top sentimentality, they are the type where if they didn't mention Jesus by name, you'd think they were love songs about a boyfriend. Although I'm pretty sarcastic about things like that, and though on the flip side I wouldn't want to disparage nuns who view their chastity as marriage to Jesus, still my title isn't about poking fun. I'm not trying to commend that you should be so passionate you want to kiss Jesus.

Instead, I'm pointing to the kissing being done *by* Jesus. There are interpreters who understand this breath and giving of the Spirit in the Gospel of John as being a french kiss from Jesus.

But, having set that odd image in front of you, I'm going to leave it aside for a moment. From that extreme intimacy with a sense of giving the Holy Spirit as so personal it involves a kiss, I want to back up to the most generic view of how you're given the Holy Spirit. It's generic, but incredibly awesome in its abundance. That's the view from our Psalm. In the Psalm God's Spirit is the breath that gives you life, and life to all humans, and to all creatures. (You might be well-served by the play on words that in both the Hebrew of the Old Testament and Greek of the New Testament, the same word can mean either breath or Spirit.) This passage

says God is giving each and every creature the Holy Spirit with each and every breath. Far from Pentecost being a one-time phenomenal event, this is supramundane. God is with you to sustain every respiration, over and over again literally in-spiring you, putting the Spirit into you, and into cattle, and birds, and sea monsters, and (we'd understand more fully than the Psalmist) even into trees of the field, which also breathe (with the Amazon rainforest being called the "lungs of the planet"), and soils and oceans also inhaling in vast global processes of trans-spiring, the Spirit moving through and across our world.

I first want to pause so we can hear how astonishing that is. If we understood God's Spirit as the breath of life for our world, it seems impossible to arrive at a conclusion to withdraw from the Paris Climate Agreement. Climate change is in a strong theological way the earth losing its breath, being so winded it just can't catch a breath, being exhausted (for a different play on words, with the fumes from our tailpipes and smokestacks). It is directly causing respiratory issues for the poor and ill, the elderly and children who continue being born. Now, if the earth can't breathe, it means it is suffocating for God's Spirit, gasping for it, but since we are choking off God's intention, earth is unable to breathe in, to be renewed, to sustain life.

Having said how remarkable that is and what an enormously faithful perspective, that in the time I've uttered these sentences, God has been replacing God's Spirit, God's breath within you over and over and over, as exhilarating or inspiring as that thought is (and I truly am hoping you're receiving it that way, as a gift more than you can appreciate), I also want to realize that that's not enough. God works constantly to renew, to rejuvenate, to revitalize you by filling you with the Holy Spirit. But even though that happens day and night, constantly

and by definition through your whole life, still that's not enough.

Because mostly you're not aware of it. You're not exhilarated by it. You're not sustained by this constant sustenance. You don't observe it everywhere you go among people and in nature. And that's why you're here. Or at least part of the reason you're here. The Psalm says that we praise God with all our breath, and maybe you're here to praise for God's lifegiving care. But I suspect you're here also because you forget it, because you doubt if God cares, wonder about God's presence, because you need reassurance.

That connects with the two readings about the followers of Jesus gathered together. They are there because they're worshipping, yes, and because they need each other. And they need more than each other, they need an assurance of God's striving for life, even through and beyond death.

So then that breath of God, a Holy Wind of the Spirit comes whipping into the room in another way, comes to refresh, to re-enliven them, comes so that their young people may dream dreams and their old people may again envision the future, comes to release them from captivity, from all that binds and confines them, to forgive so that they may share that blessing with others.

In the Gospel reading, it is a direct application of the Spirit so that they may have confidence. Now, the reading itself just says that Jesus breathed on them. But is this more than letting them sniff whether he remembered to brush his teeth on the way out of the tomb that morning?

Rather than just blowing toward them as a little symbolic gesture that God's breath was in them, it has been suggested that Jesus may

have Kissed the disciples.* In ancient culture, a Kiss meant sharing the spirit or breath of life. When you Kiss someone goodbye, it is so that a portion of life, of spirit, of being remains shared with each other. Even if we don't express it, we retain some of the sense. There on Easter evening after the resurrection, when Jesus was going away to ascend into heaven, as the readings tell us, through this Kiss and sharing of his Spirit he would still be present with his followers, with his beloved even after he said goodbye. This is exactly how the Holy Spirit is described; we heard a Gospel reading from John 14:(18) two weeks ago where Jesus says he's going away, but he'll give you his Spirit to remain with you and in you.

It may be from this Kiss of Jesus as he says "peace be with you" that the church also got into Kissing. Four of Paul's letters end with an instruction to "greet one another with the Kiss of peace." For 1200 years, the church was trying to figure out how to honor that without giving in to promiscuity and having too much smoochy-face in the worship service. I think that reaction probably overdid it. We could probably use more sense that we are supported in life, that we share life with each other, that we are cared for by God, by Jesus, and through the Spirit of Jesus, within this community. We need to be here for that reassurance, to be bound together, to breathe together, which, for our plays on words is literally the word "conspire".

And since we're being conspiratorial here together, since that's what comes from having the Spirit of Jesus within and among us, that propels us on to the next thing. We come because we need that reassurance and blessing for life, but when we come here, we're also sent. In Acts, the followers of Jesus are sent to

* *Pagan Rome and the Early Christians*, Stephen Benko, p82

share good news with those who didn't even speak a language they knew. In the Gospel reading, those followers are hiding behind locked doors, but Jesus directly sends them. He won't let them stay locked up in fear; and the forgiveness may explicitly be for those whom they fear! That's what this blessing of peace and life lead to when you're inspired by God.

I don't often do direct applications in my sermons. That presumes a sermon can be resolved, while I believe God applies the Word to you as you need it, often in miraculously unexpected ways. But today may call for some direct application, so I want to conclude with a word about our sanctuary meeting. After worship today, the MCC will be discerning our readiness to serve as a sanctuary site for an undocumented immigrant at risk of deportation and separation from her or his family and tearing up the fabric of our community. This isn't an easy conversation. It could be likely the person doesn't speak the same language we do. With ambiguous and unknown outcomes, there are plenty of reasons to be skeptical, to be afraid, to keep closed up by ourselves behind these doors and not be opened to God's mission of offering peace and life. But I am truly hoping we can catch our breath, can confront the risks, and can be on the side of blessing.

I haven't mentioned our reading from 1st Corinthians yet. Mostly we use this as a passage about each of us as individuals having diverse gifts—that Sybil can play the piano and Jean can organize the garden and Brian can be our president and John can swing a hammer and children teach us. But we can also hear the gifts of our congregation within the larger body of Christ. In asking the question of sanctuary, we may well have gifts that other congregations, other groups of eager people don't. We may be in a better place to say yes, with facilities that will serve well, and your daringly faithful

young staff, and a congregation who is accustomed—when facing hard issues—to offer leadership to the wider church.

And when trepidation remains, when we need another dose of assurance, that is why we are here together, brought into community by this Kissing Jesus, and we're inspired filled with fresh breath, with new life of his resurrection, moment by moment, week after week, and on toward the promise of eternity. Alleluia! Christ is risen!