

I don't remember learning how to swim. I've just always known. I could swim long before I could walk. Swimming has always been as natural as breathing.

I was the kid who sat on the bottom of the deep end, making the lifeguards nervous. Seconds turned into minutes. It was bliss and serenity...my own quiet world below the chaos of the surface.

Murky water, however, has always made me nervous for some reason. Still does. Ponds, lakes, rivers, the ocean on our coast...

I would still get in. I still do. But the unknown under the surface torments my imagination and wreaks havoc with my anxiety.

Years ago, I put together a canoe trip down a short section of the Congaree River. My wife, Lauren was in the front of our canoe, and Jordan, about 3-4 at the time, rode in the middle. It was fun tooling around the river, until we came to one of the old locks. You have to go through the lock because of an old low dam. The water moves quick. Somehow, as we were helping others into the lock, our canoe got caught on a low branch that extended from the bank.

We flipped.

Lauren fell out and floated through the lock. The boat flipped on top of Jordan...I took a big breath. Within a moment, I was pinned between the boat and the bottom of the river.

How long until I ran out of breath?

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One of the scariest of circumstances is not being able to breathe.

Drowning, choking, suffocating, being smothered...

I have terrible, severe claustrophobia...these are the worst of nightmares.

Even watching a person struggle to breathe is a hard thing to do.

Breathing is vital. It is life.

When God breathes into this man made of dust, the man comes alive.

Hear the psalm this morning, "You take away their breath and they die and return to the dust. You send forth your Spirit, and they are created and so you renew the face of the earth."

God's breath is God's Spirit. God's breath is the very life of God. The Spirit of God is life itself; in fact, this Holy Spirit is the giver of life. This is the promise of God, the promise offered by Jesus. Life in and through and with the Spirit.

What we see, though, is that this promise is an answer to anxiety and fear.

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The disciples are in full freak out mode. This scene happens the night before the crucifixion of Jesus, just after the Last Supper, and further, Jesus has just told the disciples that he will be leaving them.

Thomas is first: "Lord, we do not know where you are going! How can we know the way?" Jesus counters: "I am the way, the truth, and the life...If you know me, you will know my Father..." Change. Transition. And for goodness sake...where are we going?!?! I hear Philip speaking with anxiety and exasperation, tinged with hope... pleading. I imagine he, and all the others, are afraid of what is to come, what is going to happen.

And so Philip wants to see God...which is absurd! Even Moses only saw the back of God. But what he truly wants is assurance. Philip wants security, something solid to hold onto.

And Jesus responds: "Whoever has seen me has seen the Father."

This was not simply a statement of identity. Jesus is going deeper and further. I think what Jesus is saying is this: That in the person and life of Jesus we find the fullness of God, and what that means is that God is found through engaging with and loving people.

Philip says, "Show us!"

And Jesus says, "Look at who I have loved! Look at who I have healed. Look at who I have fed. Look at who I spend time with. You come to know God through loving people the way I have."

Do you want to see God? Do you want to know God? Then go do what Jesus did. Love the outcast. Find the lost. Heal the sick. Feed the hungry. Listen with a kind heart. Hold someone's hand. Sit with someone who is lonely. Make someone laugh. Give big, fully embracing hugs. Do things that give life.

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As an answer to Philip's anxiety and fears...

As an answer to how to see and know God...

In effect, as an answer to this question by Thomas of: "Where are we going?"

As an answer...Jesus promises the Holy Spirit. Jesus is promising, laying out for us, inviting us into the deeper life of God.

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St. Paul then reminds us, teaches us, that as co-heirs with Christ, heirs of God, heirs of all that God offers and bestows through this promise and invitation...we are worthy to receive all the goodness, grace, and love that Jesus himself receives from God.

HOLY COW!

To be loved with that depth is something furious and powerful! It is a defiant statement in the face of fear! This spirit of adoption then gives us a spirit of courage. This spirit of courage gives us permission to step fully into life, to live fully with abundant joy and a sure confidence.

This is what it is to have life breathed into the church...into you and me. And this is what we celebrate today: God breathing life into the Church, the fulfillment of the promise of Jesus to the disciples.

The reading from Acts shows the Holy Spirit as mighty wind and flames of tongue; the breath of God as a fire storm of power and authority gifted from God.

The power to hear, know, and proclaim the Good News of God in Jesus Christ.

This storm of wind and fire, that is the very breath of God, is the same Spirit of God that has moved throughout time and creation. The wind and fire of the Holy Spirit that breathes life into the Church is the same breath of God that moved over the waters of creation, speaking creation into being.

The Good News of Pentecost is that God is renewing the face of the earth; creation is breathing deep the fresh air of the divine life.

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The Good News, the Gospel, of Pentecost is that we can breathe again. We will not drown. We will not suffocate or be smothered.

Even when our breath runs out, even when the world presses in, even in the murkiest of waters, ...

...the breath of God *still holds* us in life, renewing and reigniting.

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In today's Gospel narrative, we skip over one of the most vital phrases. Jesus tells his disciples, tells us: **"I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you."**

The presence of the Holy Spirit, this gift, is the very presence of Jesus today. It is the gift of the divine life that binds us together and draws us deeper into the very life of God.

So breathe deeply of the Spirit of God.

Breathe in the life of God and breathe out the love of God.

Breathe in that fire and grace and breathe out the wild fruit of the Spirit.

All that God has gifted to us in the Spirit, all that God has breathed into us, we speak into the world in grace and hope and peace. AMEN.