

# ST. JOHN'S AT DIOCESAN CENTER IGLESIA EPISCOPAL DE SAN JUAN

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## A SAVING BREATH

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Text of the Sermon preached on the Feast of Pentecost

May 31, 2020

ACTS 2:1-21 | PSALM 104:25-35, 37

I CORINTHIANS 12:3B-13 | JOHN 20:19-23

Friends, I have good news for you today. “Every one who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved.” Read your bible through and through. All the witnesses agree. We are living in the last days foretold by the prophet Joel. You can belong to God’s purpose, to God’s family. You have a part to play in the change God wants for this world. You are of equal worth.

‘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.'

Read the scriptures through and through. Just as that small band in the upper room were doing in the days following Jesus' Ascension. They were looking for the meaning and evidence of a promise. Jesus called it the Promise of the Father.

Then the noise broke out, the commotion began.

We too still live in the last days awaiting Jesus' return. As the Church tells time Crucifixion, Resurrection, Ascension, Pentecost, Roman Empire, Middle Ages, Renaissance, Enlightenment, Industrial Revolution, Internet Age, are as one tick of the clock. The Spirit and the gifts are here. God declares an equal opportunity to serve and an equal worth for all.

Dreams and visions. Nightmares and revelations. These certainly are days of portents and signs. Pandemic and protest, violence and chaos in the street, mendacity and incompetence in the halls of government, false spirits of deception and fear everywhere. Strange fruit of generations of injustice and inequity laid bare for all to see. Not unlike first century Jerusalem under Roman rule.

Consider the disciples, the mother and brothers of our Lord, gathered in that upper room. Can you imagine how much noise they had to make to draw the attention of the crowds around their meeting place in Jerusalem? Can you imagine how surprised they were to realize that instead of delivering one program or plan to overthrow their oppressors once and for all, they opened their mouths in un-

known sounds and syntax. A miracle of speech? Surely. But also more decisively – a miracle of hearing! Everyone understood. From every coordinate on the map, representing every background and ability, they more than understood. They were included, celebrated, incorporated, sent out, as one body.

It seems that diversity itself, the diversity of opportunity represented by our various abilities and positions, is the first gift of the Spirit to the Church. The Church will always be the sum of the gifts of those who are baptized into it. And every gift is to be taken seriously, honored and offered.

The apostle John tells us the same thing, but in a different story. He reminds us that on that first night when Jesus had first appeared to his disciples behind closed doors in that upper room, when resurrection was just a rumor, not even a dream, that Jesus appeared to them, showing them his hands, his feet, his side. And they rejoiced. Can you imagine that moment. More than what followed after that was the first movement of the Spirit was that feeling of utter joy. To hear his voice. To be in his presence. To cry out and call him Lord. Lord.

And then to feel his breath enter us. Fill us. Remake us. Through and through. Receive the Holy Spirit. Joy. Joy. Receive the Holy Spirit! Everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved!

It is instructive to see how the apostle Paul, even with all his learning and his encounters with the risen Lord, likes to remind us to go back to the basics, to the fundamental sign of being a part of God's project. He tells us: "No one can say 'Jesus is Lord' except by the Holy Spirit." And in his great meditation on Joel's passage in Romans he adds the insights of Isaiah and Moses.

"The word is in on your lips and in your heart, the word of faith, if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, then you will be saved."

Paul uses the same marker, confessing Jesus as Lord, to explain both the presence of the diversity of gifts in the one Body, and the invitation to see that the Spirit is being poured out on all flesh – especially those who do not yet know who Jesus is, or who are getting the story for the first time.

We live in such difficult days. Everyone who calls themselves a Christian must put aside old prejudices, old justifications, old allegiances, and speak the names of all God's children. When someone cries out "I can't breathe" we must draw breath for them, give voice to them.

George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Amaud Armory, Christian Cooper. Fred who saw his job go to China. Mohamed whose home in Syria is bombed out rubble. Guadalupe whose family pays tribute to the gangs in Guatemala.

We must also put names to the civil servants who keep elected officials accountable. Names to the police who truly protect the small businesses of our cities and who deliver groceries to the elderly and undocumented. (Thank you Norristown police!)

Everyone of us must speak their names as we pray for them, and give thanks for breathing in and breathing out of the very breath of Jesus. Come Holy Spirit!

Just this week I prayed with a friend from a different zip code, with a different accent, with a different life completely from mine.

By the grace of the Holy Spirit we confessed together that Jesus is Lord, and believed in our hearts that God raised him from the dead. We rejoiced together to see and know the Lord. We rejoiced to know that each of us were bound to defend, comfort, and fight for the truth of the other. To love and serve each other.

Being witnesses to each other of the power of God's breath to make us whole. Come Holy Spirit!

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Pray! Come Holy Spirit!

Then up! Move accordingly!