

The Breath of God- doing a new thing

Breathing is something that we all need to do. Breathing in and out, taking in clean air to allow the oxygen we need to flood into our lungs. Without breath we cannot survive.

One of the interesting impacts of the Covid 19 lockdown is that the world has been able to breath.



Images from India where the Himalayas have been able to be seen clearly for the first time in 30 years. Across the world there are images of the reduced emissions or smog. Some of the concerning impacts from Climate change are still there but there are also some signs of hope.

The challenge is that we need to make the most of what we are going through and bring about a different path than what we were on.

The Bible tells us that at the very beginning of Creation the breath of God was present- *And the Spirit of God moved over the face of the waters*. The Hebrew word for Spirit is Ruach. Imagine being able to look into the very beginning of Creation, to see God, to see the darkness and the shapelessness and the void or chaos then to know that God breathed and spoke and Creation came into being. The breath of God has such power.

As we look at the two readings for today we come across God' Spirit. This is the same Spirit from the very beginning. In the gospel of John, Jesus appears in the evening of the resurrection, reassures the disciples and those who had gathered, then Jesus ***'breathed on them and said to them, Receive the Holy Spirit'*** (v22).

The Acts reading has the disciples in a room and *'suddenly, there came a sound from heaven as a mighty, rushing wind and it filled all the house where they were sitting'* (v2).

In both cases the disciples were locked away in a room. They were trying to work out what was happening since Jesus had died and they were afraid. In that time, they were afraid of the authorities and how they could be persecuted. Yet locked doors did NOT stop God's Spirit from coming and finding them.

It is quite a contrast- between the image of Jesus breathing on the disciples and the sound from heaven like a mighty, rushing wind. Yet the effect in both situations was dramatic.

Jesus used this opportunity to send the disciples out. *'Just as the Father sent me so I send you'* (v21). So they went and the proof of them going is seen in the countless millions of people across the centuries who have believed in God through Jesus Christ. If the disciples did not go, we would never have heard of the amazing grace of God.

The Day of Pentecost (50 days since Easter) was far more dramatic. Not only did the sound of a mighty wind come to the room the disciples were in, they began to speak in many different languages. AND these languages were able to be understood by Jews from many different backgrounds.

It would have been a time of chaos and noise and confusion- very far from the peace Jesus spoke of in the John reading.



Not only was the noise of the wind and the many languages there but there was fire, like divided tongues, that appeared on their heads.

At the time of Pentecost Peter was given the words to speak, supported by the other disciples, and he recalled the words of the prophet Joel.

Pentecost was the day when there would no longer be the differences between men and women, slave and free, Jew and Gentile, young or old. ALL of these differences were gone as God's Spirit went to work to bring a new creation in people's lives.

In the midst of this chaos God's Spirit went to work and that day meant that 3,000 people came to faith in Good through Jesus Christ.

Pentecost Day is not just a memory or a birthday of the early church- it is a day that reminds us that we have gifts which God has given. Sometimes we may be afraid to speak as we are unsure of the words. Yet Peter was given the words to speak from God. Through his speaking, thousands believed.

Sometimes we think that we are not good enough or wise enough or whatever. Pentecost Day tells us that we are- not always in our own strength but with the strength of God's Spirit with us.

We see this in the logo of the Uniting Church. It is no mistake that the sign in the centre is of a dove- or a divided tongue of fire. Our church is fair dinkum about the ministry of all of us- not just those who are ordained. So today, may God's breath be upon you that you might be empowered to do more than you could ever imagine! God IS doing a new thing.

