

Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of our hearts meet with your gracious approval my strength , my rock, our Holy fire. Amen.

Easter morning, Mary Magdalene announces to the disciples, “I have seen the Lord.” In our gospel for today, it is evening, Easter Sunday, the disciples are afraid and behind locked doors in the upper room. What to do, what to do. Jesus appears among them and breathes on them, “Receive the Holy Spirit.” In John we skip the 50 days, there is no waiting for the Holy Spirit to arrive. Jesus is with them and breathes on them. “Receive the Holy Spirit.” It’s not an invitation... the Greek suggests a command, not “if you like it” but rather, “here, take it.” But that’s not all. Jesus continues, “If you forgive the sins of any they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.”

Marcus Borg says Jesus’ words are not some theory as to who holds the “heavenly purse strings of grace.” His words are simply the truth about where and how the Spirit functions. If Jesus’ disciples don’t forgive, Jesus’ forgiveness – freedom, restoration, healing, wholeness – cannot come. If we leave people in their sin, Jesus cannot free them. If we do not grant people the “peace of God”, they cannot know it. If we exclude people, Jesus cannot include them. And let me add if we do not talk and act like Black lives matter, how can Jesus effectively cause Black lives to matter., to be made whole. This is a powerful responsibility.

So I’d like to get right to the point of all of the suffering this week. Let’s go back to Colin Kaepernick. How did I, you talk or act regarding Colin Kaepernick’s peaceful protests around the issue of injustice to Black lives. Our National Anthem, a patriotic song that eulogizes the history, traditions, and struggles of our country. Was I listening, were you listening when Colin said many, many, times that his sole purpose of kneeling during our National Anthem was not to disrespect the military, not to disrespect military personnel at all, but to use his social platform to bring to light police brutality to people of color and oppression of people of color. So, was I, were you, one of the many white people who were so angry by Colin’s behavior that you boycotted the entire NFL, or a game where any player was kneeling. Did I, did you listen to everything he had to say or were we more worried about how he was behaving as he peacefully protested police brutality and oppression of people of color. Did people listen, did white people listen, or just complain. When African Americans talk and talk about black lives matter, and protest peacefully, or not so peacefully for the last

400 years, do we listen? do we act? what do we expect to happen? When every black parent is still this day giving “the talk” to their young children, when African Americans are still economically disadvantaged, being followed, profiled, the list goes on and on, what do we as white people expect to happen? What do we expect after talking and protesting peacefully has not mattered? The words of Dr Martin Luther King Jr. ring loudly: “Riots are the language of the unheard. Our nation needs healing but there can be no healing without justice. You may say that slavery happened 400 plus years ago what does that have to do with us. But we know that George Floyd’s senseless death and many, many before him happened on our watch. We may say but what about the Blacks that kill whites, or the Blacks that kill Blacks, or the Blacks that kill police officers. Emily Claire Schmidt wrote in Patheos this week, “These are not examples of state sanctioned violence. They are not perpetrated on private citizens by those in power. Don’t pretend that you can’t distinguish between what is systemic and what isn’t.”

Mike Griffin, a senior organizer for community change and action of Minneapolis wrote this week. “I am so tired of words, whether they are pabulum or hateful rhetoric. What I and others who organize in communities of color, especially Black communities, that are struggling to make ends meet need are real changes and real action. We want deep investments in our neighborhoods. We urgently need to build a caring and inclusive economy. We want law enforcement to treat us with dignity, and we want local officials to show they value our lives by charging people — including police — when they wrongfully kill us.”

In 1st Corinthians today we hear from Paul that to each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. The passage concludes by saying each of us are parts of one body. Christ is the head of this body. And think not just of arms and legs, but all the unique and different parts, toenails, hair follicles, black skin, and brown skin, and yellow skin, and red skin. We need each other. That’s an important message. We need each other, as much as ever. This is a time to be kind to one another, listen to one another, appreciating our differences as assets rather than deficits. We are to be a church, not a church building but a church of people not defined by culture but defined by faith, hope, and love.

Jesus has ascended as we continue in the book of Acts this week. Acts account of Pentecost is easier to hear than John’s even in the midst of the

chaos of the rushing wind and flames of fire. The Acts account proclaims, John's Gospel commissions. After a long time of being followers and learners, the disciples are alone in the upper room. They are alone but they are together, 10 days after the ascension and 50 days after the resurrection. They don't run home to their families and jobs. Their lives have changed dramatically. Instead of their hands pulling the lines of nets to bring in fish they are folded and devoted to prayer. Like us, they too were probably stumped about what to do next. And like us, they were probably certain that they were not up for whatever was next.

The power of the Spirit is given to all people to proclaim a new world, a new vision, a new humanity, a new hope. God served all with the Holy Spirit, it was chaotic, there was not one flame, one voice, one language, but I believe God is in love with diversity, look at the trees, the flowers, the animals and birds, look at God's people. We are one of many in Christ for the common good of all.

Arvind Theodre wrote in Political Theology "The Sound of Many Tongues" "The Pentecost is not an event; it is a dynamic, revolutionary process and it continues today. The counter-imperial aspect of the Pentecost reminds us that the agents of transformation are not the elite and the powerful, despite their wealth or influence, but rather the vulnerable, the disenfranchised. Marginalized communities—as storehouses of histories and wisdom—are stepping out into castecized, racialized, masculinized, and heterosexualized spaces to disrupt the normative. We must listen and hear what is being prophesied (verse 17). To disregard such prophetic outpourings is to be complicit to the workings of the empires of today, to disregard such prophetic outpourings is to be absorbed in one's privileges, and to disregard such prophetic outpourings is to espouse exclusivism. May every unjust power, every empire be expunged at the sound of many tongues." As we hear and celebrate the birthday of the church proclaimed in Acts we are empowered, and we are commissioned by Jesus in John's gospel, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." Amen.