

BREATH OF HOPE**LESSONS**

Acts 2:14a, 22-32

Psalm 16

1 Peter 1:3-9

John 20:19-31*

THEME

Connecting to the past

Experiencing God with us

Celebrating our inheritance

Breathing the Holy Spirit

**OUTLINE OF THE THEME**

The resurrection of Jesus is more than an event that happened a long time ago. Our lessons today describe some of the impact it had on the early church. We hear the Spirit speaking through an early sermon, we find a community empowered by an indescribable hope, and we see the disciples receiving the Holy Spirit. As we read we may ask ourselves how we are like the earliest disciples, and whether our communities encounter the Holy Spirit in similar ways. In the resurrection we find hope not only for them, but for ourselves.

We will read the story of Pentecost in a few weeks, about how the Spirit descended on the disciples in tongues of flame. Today we read from ACTS a portion of the sermon which Peter preached that day. While this may seem out of sequence chronologically, it makes sense theologically, since all of our lessons in this season are attempting to help us explore the impact of Jesus' resurrection on the early church, and on ourselves.

This sermon is specifically directed towards Israelites who know their scriptures and traditions well. Peter is trying to persuade them that all that has happened with Jesus is consistent with Hebrew Scripture. He quotes two different psalms, and reminds them of Jesus' connection both biologically and theologically with David, Israel's greatest king. As Luke retells it, Peter declares that all that has happened, both crucifixion and resurrection, has happened to fulfill God's purposes of redemption. We who know what God has done in the past should be the first to welcome what God is doing now.

There are those in today's church who may have difficulty with the idea that the crucifixion was part of the

"definite plan and foreknowledge of God" (v. 23). For others it is hopeful to consider that God oversees everything. We all can find hope in the assertion that the God who was with David was also with Jesus. The hope, courage, and promise which God offers have been with us continually, and are with us still in the presence of the Holy Spirit.

Today's PSALM is the one that is quoted most extensively in our reading from Acts today. While biblical scholars would no longer agree with the declaration of the author of Acts that it predicts the coming of the Messiah, it is nevertheless an appropriate one to read in this season. The psalmist speaks of God giving counsel, providing instruction in the night, protecting and showing paths of life. In the face of death the psalmist is not afraid because God is with him. Jesus clearly experienced God that way too, as did those in the early church who saw this psalm as an appropriate way to describe their own encounter with the Holy Spirit as they faced persecution.

The FIRST LETTER of PETER opens with a bold thanksgiving for a living hope that comes from God and supports the faithful even in the midst of persecution. 1 Peter was probably written by an elder of the church in Rome to the leaders of the churches in Asia Minor. It is usually dated to the end of the first century, or even the beginning of the second. This was a time when Christians were an unpopular minority in many towns and villages in Asia Minor, and subject to various levels of name-calling, ostracism, and persecution.

The author of the letter encourages his readers to stand firm in the face of this kind of reaction. Christians are

rightly seen as different; we belong to a different social order, which is "imperishable, undefiled, and unfading" (v. 4), and this is bound to get us into trouble. The power of God is with us, the writer argues, and it is the trials which are transitory. In the midst of all that happens we need to focus on what God has done for us, and the joy we find in that.

Today our gospel reading from JOHN tells John's version of the Pentecost experience. (It is quite different to the story related in Acts.) Just as God breathed into Adam's nostrils in Creation, so now the Risen Christ breathes the Holy Spirit into the disciples. It is the gift which he promised them before he died (see John 14:15-31). Much has been written on John's understanding of the Holy Spirit because the Greek word he uses has no exact English counterpart. The gift of the Risen Christ is a Spirit which both challenges and comforts, which empowers and embraces, and which transforms them from disciples (students) to apostles (those sent out). With this gift comes not only peace (which we see in Jesus' greeting to the disciples) but also responsibility. They are challenged to pick up where Jesus has left off, forgiving sin and calling people into a new relationship with God, inspired by the breath of hope.

How do we experience the Spirit challenging and comforting us? Do we know, even in a minor way, the trials experienced by the churches in Asia Minor? The promise of God is that we are not alone, either in suffering or in celebration. Just as the earliest church found the Spirit among them, so may we. We can look to the Spirit to embrace us, and to empower us to carry on Jesus' ministry of hope for the world.

THEME CONVERSATION IN CHURCH (or assembly time)

Child's Faith Question: **How can we share in what happened at Easter?**

Materials Needed: *In a bag, bring 2 or 3 special items from home that have been passed down from relatives who have died. They may not have any monetary value, but should have value to you because of the person associated with them. (e.g. a grandfather's pocket watch, a photograph, an aunt's china cup and saucer, a handmade toy)*

I've brought some things to show you today. I wonder what you'll think of them?... For me they're really special. Now let's see here. What do you think this is? (*Hesitantly, and one by one, draw items out of the bag. As you show each—pass them around if they're not fragile—ask the children to identify them. Respond, describing them with pleasure.*) Yes, that's right. This is a ... (e.g. pocket watch). But you know, this isn't just any pocket watch. This used to belong to....(e.g. my grandfather). Do you know what he used to do with it? Right, he used to tell time, but you know he used to wear it proudly on a long chain... (*Share any details you know—how it was used, what you know about your relative, and how you got it. Show and talk about each item like this.*)

I guess these look old to you. And they are, but when I look at them I see wonderful treasures. Why do you think I feel this way about such old stuff? (*Listen for children to mention the people associated with them.*) You're absolutely right. It's because of who they belonged to... (*name the people again—by name and relationship, e.g. my grandfather John Smith*). It's because they remind me of a person who is special to me, a person who was part of my family, who loved me and who I loved. These treasures remind me of that love. (*Gather up the objects. Close up the bag and hold it up gently.*) And I'm going to want to pass these special things with their memories on to... (*name someone younger in your family*). It's almost like they're not mine, I just have them for now. But the time will come to pass them on to those who follow me. And when that happens, I'll tell them about each treasure, just like I've told you today.

(*Hold up the bag again.*) You know I feel really fortunate to have these treasures. I would be awfully sad if something happened to them... you know if the... (e.g. watch) was stolen or the (e.g. picture) was lost or destroyed. I would be terribly sad, but you know I would still have my memory of my... (e.g. grandfather's) love. I would still remember that.

That's really the most important thing. What really matters, what's really remembered, and what's really passed on, is the love. When I remember (*name one of the persons*), I remember the love we shared. That love can never be lost or broken or stolen or destroyed. I will always carry it in my heart.

We don't have any stories about Jesus giving things to his followers. But he gave them the most important thing he could—his love and his example of how to love others. And you know, Jesus' love has been passed on, from person to person, from adults to children. It's been passed on to each of us. What better treasure can there be than the gift of love from Jesus? And what better treasure is there for us to pass on, than Jesus' gift of love for each and every person. Will you do that?

Theme Conversation



SUGGESTED CHILDREN'S HYMNS

Pass It On

Every Morning Is Easter Morning

Jesus Came, a Child Like Me

Come, Children, Join to Sing

Your Work, O God, Needs Many Hands

O Master, Let Me Walk with You

Lord You Give the Great Commission

I Send You Out

pg 26 *Seasons of the Spirit Songbook* (vol.9)

#50 *All God's Children Sing*

#583 *Voices United*

#38 *Songs for a Gospel People,*

#377 *New Book of Praise,* #345 *Voices United*

#290 *Hymn Book,* #537 *Voices United*

#301 *Hymn Book,* #469 *Book of Praise,* #492

Lutheran Book of Worship,

#267 *Book of Common Praise,* #560 *Voices United,*

#642 *New Book of Praise*

#433 *Common Phrase*

pg 19 *Seasons of the Spirit Songbook* (vol.9)

The scripture verse chosen for emphasis today:

**You will show me the path that leads to life;
your presence fills me with joy.
(Psalm 16:11a)**