

Kim O'Brien, Sunday, 5/28/23, Jn 20:19-23

Mid-February, I was inspired to consider pet therapy as part of the Spiritual Care I provide to patients, families and colleagues as a hospital chaplain

With the support of hospital management I moved forward to get our Labrador retriever, Daisy, tested and certified as a therapy dog, and began bringing her to work in April

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Providing spiritual care to patients and families for about a year

caused me to think that I had a handle on the idea of the Holy Spirit,

Spirit is "pneuma" in Greek

Which literally translates to "wind-breath"

So when I hear "Holy Spirit"

I think about God's holy and sacred wind-breath

Moving and flowing... blowing through our lives

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As a hospital chaplain I regularly encounter unpredictable and unique situations with illness, tragedy and death

I believe that God's holy and sacred wind-breath nudges, guides and inspires me

to provide compassionate care to individuals and families

I've become **accustomed** to the support and guidance I believe I receive from the Holy Spirit

I rely upon it

I count on it

Maybe I had even come to think I can predict, manage, or control it

Pentecost is a day when scripture cracks open what we think we can predict, manage and control

And leaves us with more questions than answers

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Working with Daisy has opened up a fresh perspective to me

Equipped with my masters degree, 12 months of specialized chaplain training and immersed in an anthropocentric society... I expected Daisy to be a side-car to the work I'm trained to do

I expected to be in charge

I expected to lead Daisy

I expected the Holy Spirit to remain in the box that I had put her in /
/

I was completely unprepared to witness Daisy engage her own work /
/

In spite of my absolute belief in the power of the Holy Spirit, I expected the Holy Spirit to stay in her lane – the lane I had assigned her to

I share this with humility,

as I wonder if many of us have settled into living that compartmentalizes God and the Holy Spirit

to special places and times it feels more “appropriate” to bring God in...

Maybe at church on Sunday

Or when we’re really hoping the test result will go a particular way

Or when we finally acknowledge reaching the limits of our control

After exhausting every possible action we can take

and throw our hands up, releasing our concern to “God’s hands”

But otherwise we operate like the popular phrase...

“We got this!”

/ / /

So, on Daisy’s first day of work,

One of the first rooms we were called to held a young woman in her 20’s, surrounded by several family members as they waited for biopsy results to tell her if she has cancer

The anxiety and tension were palpable as Daisy sliced through it all, bringing joy and comfort where no human words could

The young woman wished for Daisy to stay and wait with her, but needing to move on, we promised to return later

Upon our return the room had cleared out, with the young woman in bed on her phone and her mom, in tears, hanging up her phone in the doorway

Her mom shook her head no at me and said “we just received really bad news”

When I asked her if she wanted to talk about it she said no.

But then she moved out into the hallway to Daisy, who stood still with her own sense of awareness and purpose

The mom, with tears rolling down her cheeks, bent over and hug-petted Daisy, saying “this is why you’re here... you make it better...”

I stood there, with my masters degree and specialized training,

after this mom said no to me,

just holding the end of the leash,

witnessing a sacred moment between her and Daisy / /

After some time, the mom looked up and said to me,

“thank you for bringing her back”

and went to notify other family members of this really bad news / /

I was awe-struck and dumbfounded

Not that I was turned down – it happens

But that Daisy was able to provide the spiritual care in that moment that I could not

That I became the side-car to her work

That the Holy Spirit swooped in as a sacred wind-breath...

so free and powerful

inspiring and using a **dog** to do God's work in a moment of crisis

Spreading love, comfort and peace

Assuring this mom that she is not alone in her despair / / /

As Daisy and I have continued to work together I'm learning to see and trust the Holy Spirit working through her

Occasionally we will be walking down a hallway and she will stop in front of a room and look at me, unmoving

Somehow she knows her work is in there

– so I knock –

and welcome awe and wonder as I witness the power of the Holy Spirit at work

/ / /

Pentecost can be an awkward Sunday for us

We are like “the others” in Acts who sneer and think that those inspired by the Holy Spirit must be drunk

We've become accustomed to neat and orderly, predictable ways of living and interacting

With one another

And even with God

We assure ourselves and one another

“We got this!” / / /

When Peter reminds the crowd – and us – about the words from Joel that
“God declares that I will pour out my (wind-breath) Spirit upon **all flesh**”

It’s hard enough to consider that the Holy Spirit is for all **people**

people who think, act and believe differently from me

But what about all animals, birds, fish, bees, butterflies... even dogs?

Imagine the Holy Spirit’s power living and moving through,

inspiring **all of creation**?!

The prophet Joel’s use of opposites

Sons and daughters

Young men and old men

Slaves and free

Above and below

Sun and moon

Is intended to demonstrate **ALL**

/ / /

Can you believe this wild, untamed God uses **ALL** living things for God's glory?

Can you believe this holy, sacred wind-breath blows everywhere

Touching even places we deem profane?

How might this unruly infusion of God impact your beliefs

About where God is and isn't

about how God is present within **your** life?

/ / /

Pentecost challenges us to move beyond our comfortable spaces

Those spaces we close and lock

Making them more reliable for ourselves

Our family

Our friends

This congregation of Faith Lutheran Church

The ELCA

Even our own hearts and minds / / /

Pentecost challenges us to consider that in spite of Artificial Intelligence technology, world-class medicine, specialized training, and our big brains...

There's a mystery in God, that we cannot understand

We cannot know it

We cannot figure it out

We cannot predict it

We cannot control, confine, direct, or manage it

We cannot contain the mystery of God!

/ / /

But we can feel it

We can experience it

We can witness it

We can be awe-struck and dumbfounded by it

We can participate in it

/ / /

So today, we may find ourselves, like the disciples in the gospel of John

Closed and Locked

Closed and Locked in fear

Closed and Locked in assumptions

Closed and Locked in the ways we've always believed or acted or thought

/ / /

And in spite of our locks

Jesus the Christ, The Holy Spirit, God almighty

Enters / / /

God breaks through our closed and locked places

With holy and sacred wind-breath

And says to us: "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you."

Christ breathes on us and says, "Receive the Holy Spirit."

/ / /

We gather here today

In the midst of our own locks

And are reminded on Pentecost

That God's Holy Spirit is **for us**

For us and **for ALL**

We are assured that God will go to great lengths to remind us of this power and promise

Speaking to us in a language only we can understand

Giving us a variety of gifts to recognize and share

Even showing us a dog who has her own work to do

All for the glory of God

Amen