

Let everything that has breath praise the Lord. Hallelujah! (Psalm 150:6)

Happy Easter, everyone! Happy Earth Day, a couple of days late.

I am amazed at Peter when I read this passage from the Acts of the Apostles. Not all that long ago, in our reading of the Passion on Palm Sunday, the disciple Peter was in the courtyard of the Temple denying that he knew Jesus...three times over! And then at the crucifixion of the man who had been so important in his life that he gave up his fishing business, left home and family, Peter was nowhere to be found. He and the other disciples went into hiding as our Gospel reading today tells us.

And this morning we hear, in the passage from the Acts of the Apostles, Peter is empowered, and standing firm in his faith despite the dangerous position that he and his compatriots are in. The high priest speaks to the men and warns them that they have been forbidden to talk about Jesus.

This time Peter doesn't run away, he doesn't deny that he knows Jesus, and the disciples stand tall, right there with him and face down the Jewish leaders. What a change! They are now called apostles (one sent on a mission) because they are no longer simply disciples (followers) they have been given the power of the Holy Spirit and they are emboldened to speak about God in Jesus despite what might happen to them as a result of this.

"We must obey God rather than any human authority," Peter says for all of them. They are unified. They are strong in their convictions...their faith. This is a resurrected bunch! The flame of the presence of the Holy Spirit burned brightly in them.

I heard a story recently, it was published by *Christian Century*; it's a story found in ecumenical circles going many years back.

Alice Thompson lived with her parents in rural southern Illinois. Besides a house and a tool shed, the other building on their small acreage was a chicken coop where the egg-laying hens roosted. When young Alice found some matches, she took them into the chicken coop to see if she could figure out how to strike one. She did figure it out, and held the burning wooden matchstick until it got too hot, then dropped it. Instead of burning out, the bit of flame fell on a piece of straw, which came alive with fire.

Determined that no one know about the matches, Alice covered up the flame with readily available material—a handful of straw. For a minute, it seemed to work, but then the pile began to smolder. She decided to smother the whole thing, so she scooped up a full armload of straw to bury the evidence once and for all. Satisfied that she had finally taken care of the matter, she ran out into the yard to play. Soon the chicken coop had burned to the ground. (I hope the chickens got out OK.)

The disciples-turned-apostles, filled with the fire of the Holy Spirit, could not be quenched either. One of the hallmarks of the Christian Church is our faith in God who is also the Holy Spirit. God is with us and inspires and enlivens us even though we did not see the resurrected Jesus...still we believe.

Phyllis Tickle wrote a book back in 2009 about the upheavals of the Christian Church every 500 years or so. In *The Great Emergence* Phyllis speaks of Pope Gregory the Great who, around the year 500, reformed the papacy and helped Christianity spread to England and other western Anglo-Saxon lands. In the year 1000 was the time of the Great Schism when the Christian Church divided in two with the Eastern church centered in Constantinople and the Western Church in Rome. Then came 1500. Remember what happened then? Does the Reformation ring any bells? The reformers like Luther, Calvin and Zwingli bemoaned the excesses of the Roman church.

And so our Anglican faith was born around this time under the reign of King Henry VIII and his Archbishop of Canterbury, Thomas Cranmer. Thomas wrote the predecessor of our prayer book, the first Book of Common Prayer. That was in 1549.

And that brings us to what I see as the new upheaval of the church. Maybe looking back on this moment, it will be seen as the next major change that the church has undergone, the 2000 year change (more or less.) We have all bemoaned the shrinking of the church beginning in the 1980s and continuing today. And then along came this awful pandemic which forced us into a new way of doing church. We would probably have just kept going on our same path year after year if we hadn't been compelled to find a solution to our worship-during-a-pandemic problem.

Suddenly, in the spring of 2020, we were all stuck at home and we here at Trinity wanted very much to stay in contact with all our parishioners, especially when people were feeling especially isolated and fearful because of all the unknowns with this Covid-19 disease.

And in steps the Holy Spirit to say to us, "You know there are tools out there to use to help alleviate people's isolation. Jesus didn't care about walking through a locked door in post-resurrection appearances. The Holy Spirit isn't affected by a disease. What would the Spirit do?"

Well, the Spirit reached out to Christine, and gave her the desire and the smarts to learn to do video editing. Many of us participated as well to create and post church services every week and post them on facebook or youtube so that we could come together even if we were far apart to worship, to share camaraderie at zoom coffee hours, to discuss scripture at zoom Bible Studies.

Then, also inspired by the Spirit, Linda found for us LocalLive. We put our resources and efforts together to use that platform and began to come back into church AND kept online parishioners and friends too.

The thing is that the Holy Spirit cannot be quenched. It may get smothered for a while, we may be stuck with a lack of vision or, maybe we were all just waiting for this confluence of technology and dire need to come together to create the way we now do church.

Also, I'm not saying that the Holy Spirit only works in 500 year intervals. But it is an interesting pattern to take note of. Has the Church been made better after each one of these big changes? It's something to ponder.

What I do know is this; because of the witness of the Gospel writer, John, we know Jesus breathed on the disciples in that hidden upper room. They became people who were no longer fearful of the High Priest or the Roman authority.

They knew that they would never go back to the way things were before...fishing quietly on the Sea of Galilee with no other plan but to catch fish and make a living. They were forever changed to see things differently.

Their job became to spread the Good News that God forgives, God heals, God saves. God's presence gave them in the first century, and us in the 21st century, strength and courage to boldly proclaim our faith and renew God's church.