

Sermon June 7th, 2020

God's Presence is Life Giving

In the midst of this pandemic I hear a recurring message from our Chief Medical Officer of Health Dr. Hinshaw. Get outside as much as you can. Go for daily walks.

I don't know about you, but I find walking very therapeutic. For example, going for a walk after a fight to cool down. Giving yourself time to reflect on how to approach the issue from a different angle. Giving yourself time to try and understand the problem from the other person's perspective. Or, going for a walk with a loved one to talk about a particular issue or to reconnect after a long day at work. Or, going for a walk to work through your stress or to discern about a decision you need to make. Or, going for a walk to stay connected to the natural world around you. Or, to get some much-needed exercise.

In fact, walking 30 minutes a day vastly improves both our physical and mental health. And it is not as strenuous as running or some other form of high intensity exercise. Though if you are physically able to do those more strenuous activities all the power to you.

My favorite time to walk is in the late Spring when we start to see the flowers and trees bloom. The grass turning from yellow to green. The baby birds singing. More than any other time of year, I feel God's presence as I witness God giving new life to God's creation after the long winter season. I often come away from these walks seeing God's presence as a life-giving presence that breathes new life into us after these long metaphorical winter seasons that we face in our lives. Like the current pandemic we are living through.

Similarly, to our winter seasons, when we are expecting a child we go through a lot of stress, whether it is physical stress that the woman feels as her body goes through a million changes throughout the pregnancy. Or the mental stress that the couple shares as they feel anxious hoping the baby is growing healthy and strong. When complications occur, this puts more strain on the couple's mental health, and on the woman's physical health. For some, nine months can feel like nine years.

Then the day finally comes when the baby comes into this world. Spring arrives. As the doctor hands the baby to the nurse, we await with anticipation to hear that first cry. Giving us proof that baby is doing well.

Then it comes. The shrieking cries. The baby has just taken it's first God given breath without it's Mother's help. One of the few times where crying is a positive sign, and easy to tolerate. A sign that God's life-giving presence is here in the room with us as we hold our baby for the first time. As we take our own breath of relief. Witnessing God's redeeming love in this new precious life we hold dear to our hearts.

There are many places in our lives where we experience God's life-giving presence. Where in the midst of our darkness, our suffering, we experience God's presence as God breathes new life into us. Whether it is on a spring walk after a fight, or in the delivery room of a hospital, or on a zoom call with a close friend, or in the words we hear in our scriptures, or in our worship experience, or in the car as we take a drive at sunset. There are many places in our lives where we experience God's life-giving presence. Feeling uplifted and renewed.

In our Genesis story, we see that in the midst of darkness God's Spirit hovers over the face of the waters, the chaos, and speaks life into being. Or in other words, breathes life into being, because every word we speak is in fact a breath that we take. In this moment, we see that God's presence is a life-giving presence that turns darkness into light. Chaos into order.

In our gospel, the resurrected Christ's presence becomes life-giving to the disciples. The same disciples who just witnessed a rollercoaster of events from Jesus getting arrested, beaten, and crucified. To hearing from the women that the Tomb where Jesus had laid was empty. Now sitting before the presence of Christ on the Mountain top. Their emotions must be all over the place.

In one vain some are still living in fear and doubt. Sometimes God is present for a while before we are able to see God's presence. Kind of like waking up, and waiting for our eyes to return to focus. It takes a moment.

Then they are able to hear Christ's invitation to reveal God's life-giving presence to others. To share the good news that God turns death into life. To invite people into the community through baptism. To teach them about

all the life-giving acts that Jesus performs as a reflection of God's presence and love for us. They are uplifted and renewed through their experience of God's life-giving love in the resurrected Christ as their eyes return to focus.

Then Jesus affirms that God is always present as he says "I will be with you always to the end of the age." "I" being the Trinitarian God who walks with us in the presence of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The same words Paul says to the people he ministers to in his greeting and benediction. The same words I say to you on Sunday morning to greet you. A greeting that reminds us that God's life-giving presence is among us. In the good times and in the bad.

Yes, like the disciples we may struggle to see God's presence in the midst of our pain, but God is indeed there trying to reassure us through the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit that God is with us. And that God's presence is a life-giving presence that breathes new life into the grass in the fields, and the trees in the forest after a long winter season. A life-giving presence that breathes life into the baby we hold for the first time as they cry out that first God given breath. A life-giving presence that breathes new life into our broken hearts when we are in the comforting presence of a friend. A life-giving presence that breathes new life into our minds and our souls every time we open the scriptures. Every time we hear the Word and experience the sacraments. Every time we pray. God's presence is a life-giving presence that is always with us.

Let us pray, Trinitarian God, on this Holy Trinity Sunday open our hearts to experience your life-giving presence in the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. As we continue to walk in this challenging time of pandemic, help us see that you are still here, and that your presence is life-giving. Healing us and redeeming us from our suffering. May we feel empowered by this life-giving presence to reveal this life-giving presence to others. In Jesus name we pray, **Amen.**

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