

The Breath of God | *Keeping In Step with the Life-giving Spirit*

Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. (Galatians 5.25)

“While Waiting”

5.5.13

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Acts 1:12-26

Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a Sabbath day's journey away. ¹³ When they had entered the city, they went up to the upper room where they were staying; that is, Peter and John and James and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus, and Simon the Zealot, and Judas the son of James. ¹⁴ These all with one mind were continually devoting themselves to prayer, along with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brothers.

¹⁵ *At this time Peter stood up in the midst of the brethren (a gathering of about one hundred and twenty persons was there together), and said, ¹⁶ "Brethren, the Scripture had to be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit foretold by the mouth of David concerning Judas, who became a guide to those who arrested Jesus. ¹⁷ "For he was counted among us and received his share in this ministry." ¹⁸ (Now this man acquired a field with the price of his wickedness, and falling headlong, he burst open in the middle and all his intestines gushed out. ¹⁹ And it became known to all who were living in Jerusalem; so that in their own language that field was called Hakeldama, that is, Field of Blood.) ²⁰ "For it is written in the book of Psalms, 'LET HIS HOMESTEAD BE MADE DESOLATE, AND LET NO ONE DWELL IN IT'; and, 'LET ANOTHER MAN TAKE HIS OFFICE.' ²¹ "Therefore it is necessary that of the men who have accompanied us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us-- ²² beginning with the baptism of John until the day that He was taken up from us-- one of these must become a witness with us of His resurrection." ²³ So they put forward two men, Joseph called Barsabbas (who was also called Justus), and Matthias. ²⁴ And they prayed and said, "You, Lord, who know the hearts of all men, show which one of these two You have chosen ²⁵ to occupy this ministry and apostleship from which Judas turned aside to go to his own place." ²⁶ And they drew lots for them, and the lot fell to Matthias; and he was added to the eleven apostles.*

This is the season when the Christian Church celebrates the coming of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost, the moment in history when God began to fulfill His promises to go OUT... OUT from Israel and the Jewish people and would pour out His presence, His Spirit on ALL nationalities. (Remember, the whole OT moved INWARD toward Israel...toward Jerusalem and the Temple and the Ark of the Covenant and now on Pentecost, that direction reverses).

So... we've been looking at the Holy Spirit and we're looking at the disciples of Jesus Christ... in the days and weeks immediately following the Resurrection. In this earliest history of the Christian Church... “Luke, volume two”... Luke tells us that the Risen Man appears to His many disciples and eyewitnesses over and over again for 40 days and then He ascends... This physical

and yet “trans-physical” resurrected Body *risers from the ground and goes into another realm*, into the very presence of God.

But before He departs Jesus Christ tells His apostles to “Wait” “...He commanded them not to leave Jerusalem, *but to wait* for what the Father had promised” (1.4)

Waiting is what I want to think about today...It’s hard to wait... why we don’t like to wait...why waiting is probably PARTICULARLY difficult for us... and why waiting is super important in the life of true spirituality... #1) Why waiting is hard AND utterly essential to true spirituality #2) A key that’ll change the way we wait #3) What to do WHILE WAITING

I saw a greeting card a while back...two characters sitting on a couch and one said, “Hey, I just thought of something I’d like to know more about.” And the other character says, “That’s a real shame”. The title said, “Life before Google”. In other words, whatever information we want...all the stuff we used to NOT know...is now available from a search engine...*at our fingertips*...on the internet... in just a few seconds. There *used to be a time* when we didn’t know stuff or had to dig through... what are those things called?... “Books”... But, no longer.

I’ve said before...we get antsy waiting for a microwave... to cook something for 60 seconds... (and there maybe people who don’t even get what I’m saying because they don’t remember life before microwaves or high-speed internet).

Time-efficiency is everything... We live in a results-oriented culture. We are not used to waiting.

And add to that the fact that WE here in South Florida are much more than most places (even most places in the U.S.) we are a rootless place. The sandy soil is almost a metaphor for how temporary things are and transient. A lot of people come here not expecting to be here very long...sort of biding there time and ...WAITING to move on. Ten families moved away from St Andrews last year alone...and families moved in as well... Alvin Toffler wrote an essay in the ‘70s called “The Paper Wedding Dress”... about the disposable society and it was almost prophetic.

And yet...while we don’t like waiting and may not be good at it...ISN’T THERE something in us that sort of senses that we’re *always* waiting for something? It could be an upcoming trip or a summer vacation...or an assignment or project that’s due or a birthday or *people visiting from out of town*... We’re always waiting for something...and sometimes we can’t even pinpoint what it is...some vague sense that we’re in transition. It seems like we have an innate sense of anticipation. AND if I don’t capitalize on these periods of waiting and transitions in my life...I won’t have a life... because life *consists* of these transition times and waiting periods.

AND ... as people have pointed out... the religion of the Bible is a religion that not only acknowledges this but promotes it. Christianity (as Jaroslav Pelikan said) is a religion of waiting. For 2000 years...from the time of Abraham, and before, the people of faith were waiting for the Messiah to come. Then He came...was among them a few years...showed them a glimpse of the End (of what resurrection would LOOK like) and then He leaves the scene...and tells them...ONCE AGAIN... "Wait."

But the key (this is the second point) one critically important key the Gospel provides for waiters like us is an understanding of...(wait for it)...of PARADOX. It's a truth that's expressed in an APPARENT contradiction. Christianity is full of paradox and if you can go with it...it'll transform your waiting... it'll enable you to capitalize on these down-times and it'll change your whole time-orientation.

Let me unpack it a bit: Ross Douthat (a NYT OpEd columnist and a Christian) wrote a book called *Bad Religion: How We Became a Nation of Heretics*. And Douthat says that most heresies (that is false and destructive deviations from the Truth) are simply a matter of someone trying to resolve a Paradox that isn't meant to be resolved. And in that book he highlights certain features of modern American consensus-spirituality or religion...It's sort of Christian but not really. One of the beliefs (and most people basically believe this...whether you're in church or synagogue or spiritual on your own) one of the four "heresies" he discusses is what he calls "The God Within".

It's the idea that if we can only learn to listen... the voice of God is in everyone...and it sounds a lot like your own heart. He tells the story of Elizabeth Gilbert who wrote the book (that became a movie starring Julia Roberts) called *Eat, Pray Love*. She learned that the voice of God...(which is always for her...always expresses her deepest desires) that voice told her to divorce her husband... to throw away all her commitments ...It's always, always, urging you to be yourself and go with your heart's desires...

But the God of the Bible comes to us in paradox. He is truly for us and also truly against us. Well, which is it? Is He for me or against me? The answer is YES!

He sees that my heart often desires things that will destroy me...and destroy others...so He opposes me. And the reason He opposes me is that He is for me! It's an apparent contradiction...and Elizabeth Gilbert doesn't have to worry about it...It's a lot simpler for her...God is her inner voice and God is always for her...VERY SIMPLE...NO PARADOX.

The problem is... Elizabeth Gilbert and her god are the same person. But the God of the Bible...relating to us in paradox...HE COMES INTO THE WORLD IN A BODY, in the Person of Jesus Christ *and HE LIVES THE LIFE WE SHOULD HAVE LIVED and HE DIES THE DEATH WE DESERVED TO DIE.*

God becomes Man...Strength becomes Weakness ... Wisdom is expressed in Folly...and out of Death comes Life. And because of that central paradox...all these other smaller paradoxes define our life - I am declared Righteous but not yet Righteous in practice. We must die to live...We must mourn to be happy... Must become poor if we will really be rich...must hunger and thirst if we will be satisfied...must lose my life if I am really to find it!

Waiting turns out to be not a waste of time...but the salvation of time. The Gospel says to those who are believing, *“They that wait upon the Lord will renew their strength...they will mount up with wings like eagle...walk and not be weary...run and not faint...”*

Time is fleeting...we can not hold on to it...like sands through the hour glass... but in the Gospel PARADOX ... to wait on the Lord...to trust in Jesus Christ somehow puts a stitch in time...somehow mysteriously saves...banks time...redeems the time.

I am living in the Great Interim – I acknowledge that I do always feel like I’m waiting for something... I’m awaiting the great wedding feast, the great consummation... I am IN the Kingdom and yet also praying “Thy Kingdom Come”... It’s the “Already and the Not Yet”...seated in heaven with Christ and yet living in a world of trouble.

You see paradox in this very episode – Judas is the great villain and the betrayer of the world’s only truly Good and Innocent Man and yet Jesus Christ CHOSE Him... Is he a villain or chosen? Answer? Yes!

Now as we live with this key in hand – the discomfort of faith and paradox – we will “wait” on the LORD... and while waiting be engaged. This passage spotlights a couple activities to do while waiting:

1) We pray. They are praying for the descent of the Spirit and God has already determined to send Him... in itself another paradox...Somehow God has even determined their prayers as part of the process. Every great move of God in history when He showers peace and mercy and justice on a people, you will always find people praying.

2) They are studying Scripture. Peter is going to get up and talk about these Psalms where David prayed against really wicked, violent, corrupt people and Peter says, “The same principle applies to Judas”.

3) They are together. Judas separated himself and ends up totally isolated (“in his own place”). But the Church is together and united. Men and women who were normally segregated... and the disciples themselves, some of whom would have normally hated each other, “Matthew the Pro-Government Tax Collector” and Simon the Anti-Government Freedom Fighter – they are

now (v.14) of one mind. The Gospel is creating a unity that breaks down deep, entrenched barriers between natural enemies.

Now I can't help putting a plug here to say, "Please get involved in Home Groups...such a great venue for these three activities to be exercised – prayer, study and discussion and togetherness – opportunities to actually get to know people."

4) They see that Judas' defection is a deep hurt and they move on to get healing for the Church AND they see that THEY are the new Israel... they will sit on twelve thrones (as Jesus Christ said) and judge the twelve tribes – so, at this new beginning...there must be twelve! And they use their waiting to seek God's guidance and then replace the missing tribal head; the vacated office has to be filled. For us this means doing relational hygiene and doing ongoing leadership development in the Church.

And then, finally, using our waiting redemptively in the Gospel PARADOX means simply trusting that He Who promised...He for Whom we WAIT is indeed faithful. We can trust Him and we can obey Him even if to do so goes against our hearts ... because He knows better than our hearts. I'm sure some were saying, "Let's get out of Jerusalem! It's dangerous..." But they are waiting because to obey...to wait in faith... to wait on the LORD is to literally put time in a bank...to save time...to redeem the time.

Let's pause now in silence...let's wait on the Lord.