

Podcast Transcript

May 28, 2023 Pentecost A

Acts 2:1-21 or Numbers 11:24-30 • Psalm 104:24-34, 35b • 1 Corinthians 12:3b-13 or Acts 2:1-21 • **John 20:19-23 or John 7:37-39**

<<*Music: “Building Up a New World,” 1st verse, fade out under opening sentence.*>>  
<<*“We are building up a new world, builders must be strong.”*>>

*[Intro and Transition:]*

*[Intro:]*

Pentecost greetings beloveds and welcome to the Word is Resistance, a weekly podcast hosted by Showing Up for Racial Justice. In this podcast, we explore the readings from the Christian bible assigned for the week in the Revised Common Lectionary, focusing on how they are providing us tools to resist white supremacy’s culture of domination, exploitation, and oppression and how these texts can inspire new decolonial, antiracist, and liberatory visions and practices to build a new world.

I’m Dr. Sharon Fennema and I serve as the Curator of Join the Movement toward Racial Justice, an antiracism initiative of the United Church of Christ. I use she and her pronouns and am recording this podcast from my home which rests on the unceded and ancestral lands of the Ohlone people, who continue to lay down prayers and raise up life on this ground, in what is now known by some as Oakland California.

I’m honored to contribute to this podcast which is geared toward white Christians like me who are searching for ways to resource and expand our capacity for racial justice. As Christians of European descent, we know we have particular work to do in resisting the logics of supremacy, which we benefit from and are implicated in, so that we might contribute to new futures shaped by the liberatory visions and flourishing of Black, Indigenous and People of Color.

The live recording of Dr. Vincent Harding’s song for the freedom movement is of a multi-racial “movement choir practice” in Denver, CO in December 2014, being led by Minister Daryl J. Walker. We are deeply grateful to the Freeney-Harding family for letting us use the song for this podcast.

*[Transition:]*

This week, the Christian liturgical calendar finds us in one of the hinge moments of the church year, the great celebration of Pentecost. This day where we celebrate the coming of the Spirit among us, moves us from the Advent-Christmas-Epiphany focus on Jesus’ birth and life and the Lent and Easter focus on their death and resurrection to the long season of Pentecost where our

attention is drawn to the community of believers and the kingdom building, new realm creating we are called to as followers of Jesus. If we begin the liturgical year dwelling with incarnation, exploring the particular, the uniqueness of God in flesh and bone, then Pentecost sets us in motion as a community, inviting us to discover the collective, the interconnection of God in water, wind and flame. As Jan Richardson puts it, Pentecost “is the blessing we cannot speak by ourselves...[it] is the blessing that comes when we leave behind our aloneness, when we gather together, when we turn toward one another...when we breathe together at last.”

So as we prepare our hearts to receive the Spirit that comes to us when we breathe together, let us center ourselves in prayer.

Behind the closed doors, locked cages, bolted prisons,  
come, Holy Spirit; breathe on us the Breath of Liberation.  
In the midst of the fear, the scarcity, the clenched-fist longing for security,  
come, Holy Spirit, breathe in us the Breath of Courage.  
Within the wounds, the pain, the cost of empire,  
come, Holy Spirit; breathe among us the Breath of Life.  
Among the traumatized, the mourning, the ones who long for peace,  
come, Holy Spirit; breath between us the Breath of Hope.  
Your presence is your promise moving among us.  
Your promise is your presence moving between us.  
So may it always be.  
Amen.

*[Main Content:]*

The Pentecost story many of us are probably most familiar with comes from the book of Acts, one of our earliest records of the nascent community of Jesus followers in the aftermath of their death and resurrection. It's a pretty great story, complete with loud heavenly sounds, rushing winds, tongues of flame, people speaking in multiple languages and being understood, accusations of drunkenness, and prophecies of new dreams and visions fulfilled in their midst. And all of it a manifestation of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. As Christian communities, this wild ride of a scripture is our origin story, a moment we turn and return to as a reminder of where we come from and a vision of where we are called to go.

But this rowdy, flaming outpouring is only one of the pentecosts our scriptures hold. Each gospel, in fact, describes multiple occasions when both the coming of the Spirit is promised after Jesus' departure, and moments when the Spirit pours out on the gathered community, usually an exhalation from Jesus' lungs. These smaller, quieter pentecosts connect God as Ruach, the creative breath that moves over the waters calling forth life from chaos, and the breath of the

resurrected Jesus, moving among their followers calling forth community from fear. So this year, let us open our hearts to what these pentecosts of tender breath are offering us in this moment.

First, a reading from John 20:19-33:

<sup>19</sup> When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors were locked where the disciples were, for fear of the betrayers, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you.” <sup>20</sup> After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw their Teacher. <sup>21</sup> Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you. As my Parent has sent me, so I send you.” <sup>22</sup> When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit. <sup>23</sup> If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.”

And another little Pentecost from John, chapter 7, verses 37-39:

<sup>37</sup> On the last day of the festival, the great day, while Jesus was standing there, he cried out, “Let anyone who is thirsty come to me, <sup>38</sup> and let the one who believes in me drink. As the scripture has said, ‘Out of the believer’s heart shall flow rivers of living water.’” <sup>39</sup> Now he said this about the Spirit, which believers in him were to receive, for as yet there was no Spirit because Jesus was not yet glorified.

<<Music interlude, verse 2 of “Building Up a New World.”>>

<<“Courage, sisters, brothers, people: don’t get weary, though the way be long.”>>

Some say, the Spirit  
or in other words, Liberation  
or in other words, the Movement  
or in other words, Abolition  
or in other words, Mutual Aid  
or in other words, Healing Justice  
or in other words, Revolution

Some say the Spirit is hurricane loud  
winds that sweep in with their door slamming, shutter banging currents  
tempting us to proclaim, “we are the storm”  
and leaving us wishing for an eye to rest in  
while we await news of the dead, of what will need repair

Some say the Spirit is what scorches us  
the all-consuming fervor that holds our feet to the fire  
and compels our awakening from complicit slumber  
too often a flame that ignites as suddenly and ferociously

as it burns out

Some say the Spirit sounds like me  
speaks a language I understand  
talks to me in words I know in ways I can hear  
meets me where I'm at – mired in the muck of racialized capitalism  
is at its most miraculous when it is the most legible to empire

Some say the Spirit is intoxicating  
luring us into new ideas, new understandings, new practices  
that make us unrecognizable to those who surround us  
incomprehensible to the logics of supremacy  
dismissed as naïve dreamers or domestic terrorists

What if the Spirit is a wound  
testifying to a resilience that does not come unscarred  
holding the promise that this freedom is real  
glistening with the possibility of flesh on its way to healing

What if the Spirit is a breath  
when a knee is on your neck  
an exhale that breaks chokeholds  
and resuscitates lungs stilled on the subway  
because you can't kill the Spirit

What if the Spirit is a heart that flows  
pour itself out to remember that we are water  
and that all water is connected to all water everywhere  
and we are a collective that springs from Love  
an interdependence that quenches fearmongering thirst

What if the Spirit is rivers of living water  
showing us that all struggle is connected to all struggle everywhere  
from Flint's lead-laden sinks and tubs, glasses and pitchers  
to Standing Rock's oil-soaked Missouri River watershed  
to Atlanta's sediment choaked Intramural Creek

What if the Spirit is what happens when we breathe together  
What if the Spirit is the way we pour out toward one another  
What if the Spirit is

in other words, Liberation  
in other words, the Movement  
in other words, Abolition  
in other words, Mutual Aid  
in other words, Healing Justice  
in other words, Revolution.

<<*Music interlude, verse 2 of “Building Up a New World.”*>>  
<<*“Courage, sisters, brothers, people: don’t get weary, though the way be long.”*>>

*[Call to Action and outro:]*

*[Call to Action:]*

For our call to action this week, I encourage you to learn more about the challenges facing your own watershed. A good place to start is the EPA’s “How’s my Waterway” website which is linked to in the transcript, but don’t forget to connect to indigenous and environmental justice groups in your area as well.

In the Spirit of Pentecost interconnection, I also encourage you to learn more about the abolition struggle to Save the Weelaunee forest in Atlanta from the development of the proposed police training facility known as Cop City. Intrenchment Creek and the South River of which it is a tributary are in serious danger as you can see from some of the videos linked in the transcript.

Finally, I hope you take some time to reflect on the watersheds that have shaped you and what they have showed you of the Spirit of God moving in and among us. What do you learn from these teachers, these kin, about what it means for living waters to flow out of your believer’s heart?

*[Outro:]*

Thanks as always for joining us. We’d love to hear from you all by commenting on our Soundcloud or Twitter or Facebook pages, or filling out the survey on our podcast page at surj dot org. Give us a “like” or rate us on iTunes, Spotify, or wherever you check out our podcast.

You can find out more about SURJ at surj dot org, where you can sign up for SURJ-Faith updates and find transcripts for every episode, which include references, resources, and action links. And finally, a huge thanks to our sound editor, Claire Hitchins!

*[Words of blessing/encouragement:]*

I close out today with the words of Langston Hughes poem, “The Negro Speaks of Rivers.”

I’ve known rivers:

I’ve known rivers ancient as the world and older than the flow of human blood in human veins.

My soul has grown deep like the rivers.

I bathed in the Euphrates when dawns were young.

I built my hut near the Congo and it lulled me to sleep.

I looked upon the Nile and raised the pyramids above it.

I heard the singing of the Mississippi when Abe Lincoln went down to New Orleans, and I've seen its muddy bosom turn all golden in the sunset.

I've known rivers:

Ancient, dusky rivers.

My soul has grown deep like the rivers.

<<Verse 3 of "Building Up A New World, Verse 1 repeated.>>

<<"Rise, Shine, Give God glory, Children of the Light"

*We are building up a new world, builders must be strong.>>*

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#### RESOURCES:

- To learn about your watershed, go to the EPA's [How's My Waterway](#) website.
- Practice solidarity with the movement to #StopCopCity by learning more about the challenges to Intrenchment Creek and the South River:
  - Learn about the [current and future impacts of Cop City on the South River](#)
  - See [recent footage](#) from the river

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#### REFERENCES:

- Jan Richardson, [When We Breathe Together](#)
- Langston Hughes, [The Negro Speaks of Rivers](#)

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"We Are Building Up a New Word," tune public domain, lyrics by Dr. Vincent Harding, used with permission of the Freeney-Harding family. Sung at NoEnemies movement choir practice, Denver, CO, December 7, 2014.

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