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**“Cling Free”**  
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**Day of Pentecost (Year A)**  
**June 8, 2014**  
1 Corinthians 12:3b-13; John 20:15-23

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*To cling*, says [Merriam-Webster](#), is to hold onto something or someone very tightly;  
to stay close for emotional support, protection;  
to grasp, stick, embrace, entwine, or cohere.

What are some things that tend to cling?

Vines, like wisteria, cling to trees as they climb; bean sprouts with tendrils  
cling to trellises as they grow.

The smell of smoke clings to our nostrils.

In winter, skirts cling to our legs when the humidity is low.

In summer, humidity clings to us, and we call it sweat.

Socks are notorious for emerging from the dryer fused to other clothes by static cling.

Certain varieties of peaches cling to their stones.

Boyfriends or girlfriends who want more of you than you are willing to give  
are called clingy.

We cling to memories, good and bad, that are indelibly etched into our brains—  
or perhaps they cling to us.

Children wrap themselves around our legs and cling  
during bouts of separation anxiety.

People with very strong wills to live are said to cling to life.

The red fuzz from Allen Verhey’s prayer shawl still clings to some of my clothes.

Biblically, the writer of Deuteronomy exhorts us to "cling to the Lord" (Deut. 10:20).

The Psalmist admonishes those who "cling to worthless idols" (Ps. 31:6).

The Apostle Paul encourages us to "hate what is evil,

but cling to what is good" (Romans 12:9).

Some renderings of the first covenant of pairing in the Garden of Eden say:

"For this reason, a man will leave his father and mother and cling/cleave to his wife, and they will become one flesh" (Genesis 2:24).

I wonder: when is it appropriate to cling and when is it not appropriate?

"In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth...

And the Spirit of the Lord was hovering over the waters.

And God said, 'Let there be light, and there was light.'

And God saw that the light was *good*"(cf. Genesis 1:1-3).

Early in the morning, on the first day of the *new genesis*,

Mary Magdalene stands outside the tomb of Jesus, crying, thinking that someone has stolen his body.

And One whom she assumes to be a gardener, hears her lament,

enters her state of discomfort, and then calls her by name: "Mary."

At which point she, too, calls him by name, "Teacher,"

and in their mutual moment of name exchange, they recognize one another.

And then Jesus makes a statement that has echoed through the centuries:

"Do not hold onto me... for I have not yet ascended to the Father."

*Μή μου ἄπτου (Me mou aptou)* in Greek; *Noli me tangere* in Latin: *Do not cling to me.*

Clinging to someone whom we love is such a signature of our humanity.

Apparently, this is one of those times when clinging, which seems so natural,

so human, perhaps for both of them, is not necessarily helpful

for either one of them.

And so he sends her to tell the disciples that he is "on the rise."

As beloved poet Maya Angelou might say it:

*You may write me down in history  
With your bitter, twisted lies,  
You may trod me in the very dirt  
But still, like dust, I'll rise...*

*You may shoot me with your words,  
You may cut me with your eyes,  
You may kill me with your hatefulness,  
But still, like air, I'll rise... (Maya Angelou. *And Still I Rise*)*

And the risen Christ sends Mary out as a witness to his resurrection.

Early in the evening, on that same first day of the new genesis,

the disciples are gathered in an upper room behind locked doors,

fearful and anxious about what has come, what is, and what is to come.

And the risen Lord comes and stands in their midst, and shares his peace,

in the face of their angst.

Perhaps they are clinging to one another as he arrives.

Perhaps they are clinging to the fear of those who would persecute them.

Perhaps they are clinging to the guilt of having deserted Jesus when he needed them the most.

Perhaps it is easier to cling to fear than to embrace hope, even when it stands staring you right in your face and wishing you well.

At this point in the story, I can hear Bono singing "Stuck in a Moment" by U2.

*You've got to get yourself together*

*You've got stuck in a moment and now you can't get out of it...*

*Don't say that later will be better now*

*You're stuck in a moment and you can't get out of it.*

(U2, *All That You Can't Leave Behind*. "Stuck in a Moment," 2000)

The clingy disciples are stuck in a moment that *is so human* of them, but not necessarily helpful to anyone.

Then to unstick them, Jesus shows them his wounds—his hands and his side—  
and they rejoice and are overjoyed because the friend they thought  
was dead is alive and stands before them in the flesh.

But you already know this because this is the Easter story,  
and we told this story seven weeks ago, and now it's Pentecost  
and time to celebrate a new episode in the Jesus saga.

But did you know that this is a little Pentecost, right here on Easter evening?

This is the gospel writer John's version of Pentecost.

This is the Pentecost that doesn't get much publicity because it is light  
on fireworks and fanfare.

This is the still, small voice of Pentecost, *the whisper of the Holy Spirit*,  
that doesn't make the windows rattle or singe the hair off of anyone's head.

And frankly, I think this is the more difficult of the two Pentecost accounts.

On Easter evening, Jesus shares his peace with his clingy friends,  
and then he breathes on them, *the breath felt around the world*.

He breathes his Holy Spirit on them, and in doing so, he recreates them,  
just as God breathed goodness and life

into the nostrils of the first beings of creation.

He breathes his Holy Spirit on them and encourages them *not to cling*,  
but to let go of insecurity, fear, guilt, hurt, hatred, grudges,  
and old ways of being in the world.

What is significant about this breathy, barely audible Pentecost?

Archbishop Desmond Tutu says it this way:

"Many of us can acknowledge that God cares about the world

but can't imagine that God would care about *you or me individually*.

But our God marvelously, miraculously cares about each and every one of us.

The Bible has this incredible image of you, of me, of all of us, each one,  
held as something precious, fragile in the palms of God's hands.  
And that you and I exist only because God is forever  
blowing God's breath into our being.  
And so God says to you, "I love you.  
You are precious in your fragility and your vulnerability. Your being is a gift.  
I breathe into you and hold you as something precious....  
Your name is engraved on the palms of my hands...  
the very hairs of your head are numbered."

(Desmond Tutu. *God's Dream*, pp. 8-9)

In other words, the God who comes to us as Jesus, the Risen Lord,  
is the good shepherd who calls his sheep *by name*,  
holding each one of us as someone precious, and then breathes on us,  
and bids us not cling, but sends us out on a very specific mission.  
(John 10: 3)

And what is that mission?

Desmond Tutu again notes that those who have heard the voice of God in their lives,  
who receive the Word, or are imbued with the Spirit,  
encounter the divine *for the sake of others*.

He says, "Moses encounters the divine at the burning bush,  
and he receives his instructions to go and tell Pharaoh to 'let my people go.'

The seventy elders receive a share of the Spirit given to Moses  
to assist him in judging the people.

Saul is Spirit-filled so that he can become king, and the Spirit  
is snatched back when he proves disobedient....

This rhythm is repeated in the New Testament... *the Spirit is not given  
so that the individual person may luxuriate in its possession*.

It is given *to goad him or her into action*, to prepare him or (her) for the stern business  
of loving neighbor, not in a nebulous fashion, but in flesh-and-blood terms,

love incarnated in the harsh reality that forms the ordinary  
life-setting of so many of God's children."

(Desmond Tutu, *God's Dream*, pp. 109, 110)

So here is the hard part of John's mini-Pentecost: in this still, small Pentecost,  
the name of God's neighbor-loving mission is *forgiveness*.

Jesus couldn't have made it easy, could he?

In that upper room on the first day of the new creation, behind those closed doors  
with his friends clinging together in fear, Jesus walks into their distress,  
shares his peace with them, breathes the Holy Spirit into them,  
then sends them out into the harsh reality of ordinary life  
*as his agents of forgiveness*.

The Holy Spirit is not theirs to possess; it is not theirs to make them feel better;  
it is not theirs to cling to like a security blanket.

It is theirs to move them out, to unstick them, to encourage them,  
to motivate them, to send them *to others*  
in order to bind up the broken-hearted and  
*to begin the hard work of healing relationships*.

That's what this mini-Pentecost is all about: forgiveness,  
overcoming barriers to relationships.

Maybe we would prefer the fiery, windy bombast of the other one.

Maybe we would prefer to stay in bed and dream dreams,  
or travel to the mountaintop and see visions,

to simply to call upon the name of the Lord and be saved. I would!

But no, this Pentecost, this exhaling of the Holy Spirit actually sends us  
back into our complicated world of dysfunctional relationships  
to be agents of healing and reconciliation.

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., in a passage from his book *Strength to Love* said:

"We must develop and maintain the capacity to forgive.

Whoever is devoid of the power to forgive is devoid of the power to love.

It is impossible even to begin the act of loving one's enemies without the prior acceptance of the necessity, over and over again, of forgiving those who inflict... injury upon us....

Forgiveness does not mean ignoring what has been done or putting a false label on (it)....

It means, rather, that the evil (hurtful) act no longer remains a barrier to the relationship.

Forgiveness is a catalyst creating the atmosphere necessary for a fresh start and a new beginning..." (Johann Christoph Arnold. *Why Forgive?* pp. 29-30)

And so we are back to the new beginning, the first day of the new genesis with the Spirit of God hovering ever so closely, and the word "good" echoing through creation.

And I think this is an important message for our church to hear as we pause to reflect upon our history, to understand where God has called us in the past, but to not necessarily cling to that identity, or to those who were our leaders in the past.

*God is doing a new thing here. God's Holy Spirit is on the move.*

*No transformation happens without crisis.*

Forgiveness is necessary and will be necessary for the fresh start and the new beginning we all envision.

We also are engaged in a mission study: an introspection of how we as a church have functioned as an emissary of God's goodness in the community and world.

But this does not necessarily mean that we need to wrap tendrils around our cherished endeavors and cling to them for life.

*God is doing a new thing here. God's Holy Spirit is on the move.*

*No transformation happens without crisis.*

But... many acts of forgiveness are necessary and will be necessary for the fresh start and the new beginning that is God's dream for FPC.

I want to close with words from Julian of Norwich, a fourteenth-century mystic, who while clinging to life, near death, experienced fifteen revelations of God's love centering on Jesus. According to her revelations: "God's love creates all that exists, it sustains all and redeems all, it is unfailing even in times of sorrow or trial, it is unconditional, it is a love plenteous beyond imagining, it is all powerful and all embracing, and in this love there is no place for anger or wrath. God's whole purpose is to bring all into the bliss of heaven, so that 'all shall be well.'" Amen.