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St. Mary's Episcopal Church, Barnstable, MA

*Luke 9:28-36*

We are drowning in conspiracy theories these days; surrounded by collusion and collaboration. Not that it's anything new.

Think of rumors about a CIA conspiracy to kill President Kennedy or those surrounding 9/11 or the death of Princess Diana. My favorite might be the extraterrestrial reptilian humanoids with only one objective which is to control the world. All revolve around the belief that powerful people or creatures or organizations are secretly manipulating historical events.

Most of this is crazy-talk, but still we find ourselves drawn to it. There is something within us that tries to make sense of tragic or shocking events, and very often we try to pin blame on a mysterious group of people conspiring to do us harm.

Of course, it's one thing to see a hidden hand in the assassination of JFK. It's another thing to see a hidden hand in the story of the transfiguration. In today's passage from St. Luke, we catch sight of something really strange happening, a paranormal something that is way off the charts. If you're Peter, James, and John, you can't make up this stuff. More weird than catching a boatload of fish on the left side rather than the right side of the boat. God is orchestrating a shocking event — one that terrifies, but also glorifies.

It's a divine conspiracy, you could say. Collusion. Collaboration.

Peter, James, and John go up a mountain to pray with Jesus. There, the appearance of Jesus is changed, his clothes are dazzling white. Moses and Elijah appear speaking of Jesus's departure — which will be accomplished in Jerusalem. Then a cloud comes and overshadows them all, and the disciples are terrified. The voice of God thunders. And as quickly as the stunning spectacle starts, it ends. Jesus is found alone, and the disciples remain stuck in bewildered silence.

We can call this a conspiracy because it involves a powerful force no less than the Lord God Almighty, maker of heaven and earth. God intervenes in human affairs and manipulates a historical event, turning a mountaintop prayer retreat into an awe-inspiring announcement that Jesus is God's Chosen One, his Messiah, his Beloved Son. Look at the story, and you can see that the hidden hand of God is everywhere.

But there's a problem. The word "conspiracy" carries a ton of heavy, negative baggage these days. Yet, the word is really the right word in this case. The word "conspire" literally means "breathing together." When people plan together secretly, they are "breathing together" — you can just picture them huddling together and plotting away in some undisclosed location. In the same way, when God works with us to advance his will, we "breathe together" with God. God's *ruah* — the Hebrew word meaning breath, spirit, or wind — fills us with life, inspiration, and power, and it gives us the ability to push God's plan into the world. God does not do God's work alone.

Think of Jesus on the mountaintop, breathing together with God.

Moses and Elijah, breathing together with God.

Peter, John, and James — confused by what they are seeing, but beginning to breathe together with God, but it's more like a gasping than smooth, easy breathing.

Whenever people breathe together with God, they become part of a divine "conspiracy."

So what does it mean for us to be breathing with God today? We are invited into the Lord's conspiracy, and challenged to be part of a network of cells operating all over the world. Within these cells, we breathe with one another, but more importantly we breathe with God. We allow God's breath — God's *ruah* — to fill us with life, to inspire us, and to give us the power to push his divine agenda.

Pastor Alan Kimber of First United Methodist Church in Lodi, California, says that the "challenge of the church is to breathe together. When the community breathes together, exciting things can happen. We can't leave the breathing to one person."

Here's a story about some Christians who "conspired" to behave like Christians.

A certain man, a Christian, lived in the southern part of China and was a rice farmer. His farm was located in the middle of a hill. In time of drought he used a water wheel, worked manually by a treadmill, to lift water from an irrigation stream into his field.

His neighbor had two fields below his. One night his neighbor made a breach in the retaining bank and drained off all the water from the Christian's field into his two fields. When the Christian notice the breach he repaired it and filled his field again.

This happened three more times.

Finally he consulted some of his Christian friends and told them what he suspected his neighbor of doing. He said to them, "I've tried to be patient, but is it right to continue to be quiet about this?"

After they had prayed together about it, one of them said, "If we only try to do the right thing, then surely we are poor Christians. We have to do something more than that which is right." The troubled Christian took these words to heart. The next morning, instead of repairing the breach once again, he first filled his neighbor's two fields and then in the afternoon he filled his own field.

After that the water stayed in his field. His neighbor was so amazed at his actions that he began to inquire the reason and in due time he, too, became a Christian.

There are good and right reasons to breath together. That being said, imagine the good that has been and is being accomplished by those Christians breathing together with God and Jesus and each other. And this passage for St. Luke can inspire our own practice.

God's conspiracy begins with Jesus praying. There is no better way to begin the process of breathing with God than to follow Jesus in this practice. Prayer doesn't so much change God's mind as it changes our hearts — it makes us much more likely to be co-conspirators with the Lord. Even if God does not bring you the answer you want, writes Frederick Buechner, God "will bring you himself. And maybe, at the secret heart of all our prayers, that is what we are really praying for."

When Christ's appearance changes, and his clothes become dazzling white, it is a sign of his intimacy with God. Once you start breathing with God, your appearance may change, too. This was true for Moses. It was true for Jesus. And it can be true for you. You begin to live a transfigured life, a life that is transformed by true intimacy with God.

Then, Moses and Elijah appear, and talk about God's plan for Jesus — in particular, they speak of Christ's departure, "which he was about to accomplish in Jerusalem" (vv. 30-31). Moses, Elijah, and Jesus are "conspiring" together — breathing together — about this world-changing

plan, and although Peter wants to build three dwellings to capture the glory of the moment (v. 33), Jesus knows that the divine conspiracy cannot be achieved on the mountaintop. It has to move relentlessly toward the cross.

Jesus also made the point that if we're going to follow him, to "breathe" with him as it were, it's going to mean self-denial; it's going to mean the death of selfish desire and the birth of godly desire.

The disciples had been stunned by this experience, hit hard by an unfiltered blast of the power of their divine Master. It took them some time to recover from the shock of being drawn into a divine conspiracy.

For you, however, the end of the story is different. You know what it means to breathe with God. You've had time to get used to the fact that Jesus is Lord. You are beginning to understand the significance of his suffering, death, and resurrection. You know that God's conspiracy has begun. We can breathe with God and other Christians to do God's work, to feed the hungry, share with those in need, offer care to the hurting, proclaim his Good News. Take a deep breath now, for only one question remains for you to answer: "Are you breathing with God?"