

Green Hill Presbyterian Church  
“Take A Breath”  
Thomas G. Speers, III  
Pentecost—May 20, 2018

Lessons: Ezekiel 37:1-14; Acts 2:1-21.

Pentecost is the church’s day to celebrate the gift of the Holy Spirit. The Greek and Hebrew words which we translate Spirit, can also, just as accurately, be translated as wind or breath. If you want to visualize the Holy Spirit, if you want an image for the Holy Spirit, then look at the air around us here, the air that we breathe. That’s where you can find God’s Spirit. Every time we take a breath, we breathe in a portion of God’s Holy Spirit. What we *do* with that is another matter: we can celebrate that Spirit or we can ignore it, simply not noticing its presence. I would encourage you sometime to meditate on that image of the Spirit as breath and imagine yourself breathing in God’s Spirit, letting that Spirit move to the farthest extremes of your body; thinking of God’s power strengthening you and holding you; and then when you exhale, imagine that you are exhaling all that keeps you from being the person God created you to be. Bessie’s great grandmother, who like our own Betty Kendall lived to be more than one hundred years old, had the habit every day, when she went outside, of breathing ten deep breaths and she encouraged her family to do the same. I doubt that she would have said that she was celebrating the Spirit, but in a way she was. Think about the way we often live, with short, fast breaths that reflect the hectic pace in many of our lives. Then think about taking a deep breath, and the way that kind of breathing can bring peace, and comfort, and strength and even courage. The Holy Spirit is that part of God which is closest to us, surrounding us all the time and forever calling us, comforting us, encouraging us, challenging us to be the people God would have us be.

Barbara Brown Taylor suggests that “if you have studied earth science, then you know that our gorgeous blue-green planet is wrapped in a protective veil we call the atmosphere, which separates the air we breathe from the cold vacuum of outer space. Beneath this veil is all the air that ever was. No cosmic planet-cleaning company comes along every hundred years or so to suck out all the old air and pump in some new. The same ancient air just keep recirculating, which means that every time any of us breathes we breathe star dust left over from the creation of the earth. We breathe brontosaurus breath and pterodactyl breath. We breathe air that has circulated through the rain forests of Kenya and air that has turned yellow with sulfur over Mexico City. We breathe the same air that Plato breathed, and Mozart and Michelangelo, not to mention Hitler and Lizzie Borden. Every time we breathe, we take in what was once some baby’s first breath, or some dying person’s last. We take it in, we use it to live, and when we breathe out it carries some of us with it into the next person, or tree, or blue-tailed skink, who uses it to live.

“When Jesus let go of his last breath,” she continues, “...that breath hovered in the air in front of him for a moment and then it was set loose on earth. It was such pungent breath--so full of passion, so full of life--that it did not dissipate as so many breaths do. It grew, in strength and volume, until it was a mighty wind, which God sent spinning through an upper in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost. God wanted to make sure that Jesus’ friends were the inheritors of Jesus’ breath, and it worked.”<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Taylor, Barbara Brown. *The Gospel of the Holy Spirit*, in Home By Another Way. Boston, MA: Cowley Publications. © 1999.

You know the story. They were all together in one place, about one hundred twenty of them, perhaps in the same upper room where Jesus had celebrated the last supper. You can imagine how they felt. Surely, they wondered how they would carry on without Jesus. Some were afraid of the Jews. Some were afraid of the Romans. Some were afraid of failure. Some weren't sure how they felt but were numb with sorrow. Into their midst blew God's mighty wind, all through the house, sparking flames of fire above their heads, filling each one of them to the brim with the power of God's Spirit, so that suddenly they started speaking the good news of God in every imaginable language. These disciples spoke so that people from every region, of every race and people, could suddenly hear and understand the message of God's mighty acts, in their own language. In one day alone, the church grew from that small band of one hundred twenty to a group of over three thousand. The weak were made strong, the shy became bold, the scared gained new courage. When they spoke, they sounded like Jesus, and suddenly they found themselves doing things that previously only Jesus had done: they put their hands on people and they were healed. And nobody, the disciples included, understood how it had happened, except that they had breathed in that mighty wind and it had transformed them. In the same way that God entered Mary, the mother of Jesus, so now the Spirit chose to enter a whole group of believers, using, as Mary had done, their own bodies to share God's good gift. God was now being born again, but this time through a whole community.

And the Spirit continues to blow into our midst today. It continues to redeem and restore and transform. It calls us to be our authentic selves. It brings life to dried up old bones. That's what we celebrate on Pentecost. Those of us who have experienced failure, breathe in the Spirit and be transformed. However you've failed, it is not enough to separate you from God. Breathe in the Spirit. Those who know about broken relationships, breathe in the Spirit and be transformed. Those who live in fear, breathe in the Spirit and be transformed. Those who feel inadequate, breathe in the Spirit and be transformed. You may feel that you aren't as good a person, or believer as someone else, but God isn't calling you to be them. God is calling you to be you. Breathe in the Spirit and begin the process of becoming the person God calls you to be.

As we welcome new members today and renew the call of their baptisms, we remember that the Spirit cries over us the same words that the Spirit proclaimed at the baptism of Jesus: "You are my beloved, in whom I am well pleased." That is a word the Spirit speaks over each one of us. It is a word we are invited to hear for ourselves and to proclaim for others: you are God's beloved, in whom God is well pleased.

Take a breath. That's what the Holy Spirit feels like. Take another and welcome God's Spirit. Take a breath and begin the process of restoration and renewal. That's what we celebrate at Pentecost.

Let us pray: Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on each one of us. Melt us, mold us, fill us, use us. Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on us. In the name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.