

A sermon preached at Zion Episcopal Church

Pentecost, Year A

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Texts: Acts 2:1-21, John 20:19-23

Have you ever wondered what would have become of Jesus' disciples Without Pentecost? Without the Holy Spirit? Well for one thing, life would have been much easier for them. They could have just gone back to their old way of life. They could have gone back to the homes and families and occupations they had left behind when Jesus first invited them to, "Come, follow me." They could have chalked it all up as a 3-year adventure with a very interesting and compassionate man. As it was, that little band of ordinary fisherman, who huddled together behind locked doors became a force for change in the world.

That transformation from fear ...to courage and conviction is described in the book of Acts. The disciples are set on fire by the rush of an intense wind which impelled them out into the streets to speak to all they met about God's deeds of power. And though they met some who scoffed, many more wanted to know how they were hearing the words of the disciples in their own languages. They wanted to know what this strange and amazing event meant. And 3,000 people from many different countries were baptized.

This moment is called the birth of the church; because the disciples could no longer stay locked into their old ways of being. They rushed forth to do God's work in the world.

The Gospel of John describes a quieter setting. On the night before he was crucified, in what is known as his Farewell Discourse, Jesus invited his disciples to "receive the Holy Spirit," and breathed on them. He breathed on them. And he promised that they would be given the power they need to be a reconciling force in the world. "As the Father sent me, so I send you," he said. "If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven."

Peter recognized that the powerful force they experienced is the same Spirit promised by God through the prophets and he quoted the Prophet Joel: "In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. And your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, the young shall have visions, and the old shall dream dreams." To the wondering crowd gathered on Pentecost Peter declares that the words of Joel have come to pass. Old rules about power and inclusion are breaking open. All people; no matter their gender or class or ethnicity will be given this same spirit. Those who had little hope will begin to dream again. Ordinary people will receive the power and the courage to speak truth to power as did the prophets of old.

The same Spirit promised through the prophets, the same Spirit given by Jesus. The same spirit that filled the disciples is looking to do a new thing in us too. Whether the Spirit's inspiration comes to us as a fiery charge or on the wings of a still small voice, all people can receive God's vision for a world in which differences can be celebrated, appreciated, and utilized for the common good. Whether the Spirit moves in deeply mystical ways or in more ordinary moments; all people can be awakened and gifted to be instruments of healing for this fragile earth, our island home.

Like the early disciples huddled together in the upper room, we might feel frightened by events in the world around us. We may feel locked in by uncertainty about how to move forward when faced with big decisions or obstacles. When concerns such as these arise, remember Jesus' invitation to receive the Spirit which is continually offers to us. Breathe in his Spirit. Breathe in his presence and his Peace.

Breath prayer is an ancient Christian prayer practice dating back to at least the sixth century. Historically, it is associated with the Eastern Church, particularly Greek and Russian Orthodox churches. Breath prayers can be used in any place and at any time. They are perfect for commuting times or even sitting at one's desk at school or work. They can provide a mini-sabbath in the midst of a busy day. A time to be aware of God's presence any time of day.

I invite you to try it now.

1. First, make sure you are sitting comfortably with both feet on the floor.
2. Close your eyes and recall the line "Be still and know that I am God"

(Psalm 46:10). Be still, calm, peaceful, open to the presence of God.

3. Taking a slow deep breath; Breathe in the words "God's peace."
4. And then breathe out the words, "God's presence."

God's Spirit is with us, right here in our midst, and today is someone's Pentecost. Every day is someone's Pentecost. God Holy Spirit is not limited to just one moment in time or to a date on the calendar. Receive the Holy Spirit. Let her inspire you, move you and strengthen you, to leave our gathering this morning with your heart on fire with God's transforming love.

We are on the threshold, Lord. Send forth your Spirit, and renew our lives, renew the face of the earth. Send us out to heal in your name. Amen