

Pentecost Sunday
June 4, 2017
The Rev. Denise Trogdon

Breath of God

Breathe on me breath of God, fill me with life anew, that I may love what thou dost love and do what thou wouldst do, Amen.

If you have ever taken a yoga class or done any structured meditation, you may know that these disciplines begin with centering on the breath. By slowing our pace and focusing our attention, we harness an energy that is life giving. The breath of life has the power to calm our fears and to inspire us to action. This breath, that we do so automatically and without notice, is the very essence of our being. Yet, for many of us, it is only when it is taken away, if only for a moment, that we remember this gift.

Today we celebrate the feast of Pentecost observed on the 50th day after Easter, when we commemorate the descent of the Holy Spirit upon the disciples and the birth of the church. Our readings depict this very breath of God, arriving in diverse ways with a variety of gifts. In unexpected moments she comes to us, difficult to grasp, always on the move.

In the book of John we hear the story of Jesus' resurrection appearance to the disciples who hid behind locked doors. Still reeling from their loss, the risen Christ appeared to them and his first words were, "Peace be with you." He came to release the disciples from fear and empower them with a sense hope and purpose. With the creative breath of God, Christ invoked the presence of the Holy Spirit to be with them, as they were sent out to continue the work of the kingdom. "As the Father has sent me, so I send you" and the disciples were enabled to move from anxiety to proclamation. This breath of life came in the form of a holy comforter, who transformed their fears into a faith that would inspire generations.

There was nothing comforting about the rush of wind and tongues of flame that descended upon the young Christian community in the book of Acts. Today in the church when we read this passage there was a cacophony of voices that feels disruptive and chaotic. I imagine this is exactly how those disciples felt. The Holy Spirit came not to comfort, but to agitate and provoke those exhausted and discouraged disciples. Their vision and hope seemed a distant memory with Jesus' physical absence. How could they continue the mission without the presence of the one who inspired them? Tongues of fire and violent wind moved them to action, empowering them to disciple thousands into faith, thereby birthing the church.

Now I dare say that I have not seen tongues of fire or Christ walking through locked doors in my lifetime. But I can recall countless resurrections, unexplained healing, moments of peace and empowerment in the midst of trouble, kindness where I least expected it. I have also experienced the agitation when the Spirit not so gently urges me to notice what needs attention. These fruits of the Spirit blow through our lives comforting and disturbing us. If we pay attention we harness an energy that is life giving.

Renowned author and speaker Rachel Held Evans wrote a book entitled *Searching for Sunday*, loving, leaving and finding the church. In it she describes her journey as a millennial who left organized religion, dry and disillusioned, looking for authenticity and the lived experience of faith. Held Evans has reached the hearts of many who struggle to find that breath of life that animates our existence and gives us meaning and purpose. She found her way back to the church not because of its attempts to be more hip with coffee shops and fog machines, but through the sacraments and the work of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit's nudge urged her to pursue a faith lived, shared, spoken and enacted in the presence of others.

Rachel writes, "The Spirit is like breath, like wind, like fire. With breath, the creator kindled the stars, parted a sea, woke a valley of dry bones, inspired a sacred text. The Spirit inhales and exhales in a million ordinary ways, animating, reviving and nourishing us. The Spirit is like fire, she says, deceptively polite in its dance atop the wax and wick of our church candles, but wild and mercurial as a storm when unleashed. The Spirit is like wind. The wildest of all things, it travels to every corner of a cornerless world. It can whisper or whistle or roar, bend, break or inflate. It can be harnessed but never contained. This is what's most annoying and beautiful about the Holy Spirit, and why we so often miss it: It has a habit of showing up in all the wrong places and among all the wrong people, defying our categories and refusing to take direction. "

Sometimes we have to get knocked off our center to pay attention. When my daughter was 16 and a new driver, she recalls a day when she was alone in the car and approaching a green light and suddenly heard a loud voice say stop! She was so startled by the voice that she hit the brakes. Not ten seconds later a large truck ran a red light. She believes the Holy Spirit saved her that day. I believe that we are all being saved by the Spirit in extraordinary and ordinary ways. We have only to notice and receive the gift.

I invite you on this Pentecost day to look and listen for the leanings of the Holy Spirit in your life. Even when our faith is running dry or we are feeling disillusioned, the Spirit surprises us with new possibilities. Consider the many gifts you have been given and the ways you are being encouraged to live them out. For we are, as Paul says, the Body of Christ, given a variety of gifts for the common good. We are unified by the one Spirit, and authorized and equipped to care for this world God loves so much. What is the Spirit saying to you? Breathe on us breath of God and fill us with life anew, that we may love what thou dost love, and do what thou wouldst do. Amen.