

Acts 2:1-21 When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.

Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each. Amazed and astonished, they asked, "Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language? Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabs--in our own languages we hear them speaking about God's deeds of power."

All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, "What does this mean?" But others sneered and said, "They are filled with new wine."

But Peter, standing with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed them, "Women and men of Judea and all who live in Jerusalem! Listen to what I have to say! These people are not drunk as you think- it's only nine o'clock in the morning! No, it's what Joel the prophet spoke of:

In the days to come- it is our God who speaks – I will pour out my Spirit on all humankind. Your daughters and sons will prophesy, your young people will see visions, and your elders will dream dreams. Even on the most insignificant of my people, both women and men, I will pour out my spirit in those days, and they will prophesy. And I will display wonders in the heavens above and signs in the earth below: blood, fire and billowing smoke. The sun will be turned into darkness and the moon will become blood before the coming of the great and sublime day of our God. And all who call upon the name of our God will be saved."

#### 6/12/11 – Pentecost – Sermon by Susi Kawolics

When my daughter was in 8<sup>th</sup> grade – she went on a class trip to Canada. This trip gave students an opportunity to tour Toronto, visit the Science Center, have dinner on a river cruise, among other activities. Because the school was combining this excursion with some of their curriculum for the year, specifically an energy unit for Science, part of this adventure included a side trip to see wind turbines in action. The bus ride to these turbines took about three hours. When they all arrived, due to a mix up, or miscommunication of sorts, they were treated to seeing all of two wind turbines. Basically, these weary travelers got out of the bus, looked at the turbines, and got back on the bus for the three hour ride back. Needless to say, they were none too happy about the under-whelming experience. But they did take it in stride – going so far as deciding on the phrase: "We love Wind Turbines" as the motto to be printed on the back of their official 8<sup>th</sup> grade class sweatshirts!

The Pentecost event which we celebrate this morning was, I would say, just the opposite of my daughter's experience. The Laurel School eighth graders had some expectation about seeing the power of wind, and they were very disappointed seeing no evidence of that energy. On the other hand, the disciples who gathered in the upper room on Pentecost morning, had no expectations for that day, and they were overwhelmed by their experience. They were amazed and astonished by the unexpected force of the rushing wind entering the room. For the Laurel girls, the trip they took was later commemorated in the writing on the back of their shirts, not because it was so spectacular, but instead, because it was so spectacularly disappointing, that in the end, it became a memorable, and eventually humorous, event. The experience of the disciples, however, was recorded in the passage

we read today from book of Acts because of its phenomenal energy, its life-changing power, and its significance as the birthday of the church.

The followers that were gathered were meeting in an upstairs room in Jerusalem. The disciples had just chosen Matthias as their replacement for Judas. They were among a multitude of other Jews, who were also gathered in that holy city to honor the day of Pentecost. We think of Pentecost as a Christian holiday which commemorates the coming of the spirit giving birth to the church. But is it also an ancient harvest festival, when the Jewish people celebrated the gathering of the first sheaves of barley, and the giving of the Law to Moses on Mt. Sinai. That is why people were in town from all over the Roman Empire, from the entire known world, at that time.

On this morning of Pentecost, the disciples were still a bit shell-shocked from the happenings of the last fifty days. They had experienced Jesus' crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension. Just before he ascended, Jesus had said to them: "And see, I am sending upon you what my Father promised; so stay here in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high." That's what these disciples were waiting for - they had not begun their ministry, they were not sure when and how they would receive this power Jesus had promised them.

And then, suddenly, unexpectedly, it happened. *From heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit.* The disciples would have recognized the sound that came like the rush of the wind. The word used for wind is the same as the one used for the voice that they heard some years before. When Jesus was baptized, the Spirit descended upon him like a dove, and the voice from heaven, that same voice had said: "You are my Son, my beloved...." This was the voice, the wind that rushed into the room.

Then we are told that all of them were filled with the Holy Spirit. The word for spirit here is the Hebrew word "ruach," which can mean "wind," or "breath," or "spirit." It was not only made manifest in that upper room on Pentecost, but it is also the same spirit that has been present since the dawn of time. It is the spirit that we read about in the first chapter of Genesis, which talks about creation and tells us that *the Spirit of God was moving over the surface of the waters.* This is the spirit which gave birth to all of creation. It is no wonder that this same spirit would give birth to the creation of what we now call "the church." Filled with this spirit, those confused, questioning disciples were able to go courageously and they began to proclaim their story to the world.

In the second chapter of Genesis, we hear yet another aspect of spirit or breath. We are told that *"God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being."* God's breathing upon the disciples, breathing the holy spirit into them, is reminiscent of God giving life to that first human being. The very breath of God is what has given life to humankind from the beginning, and continues to give and sustain the life of every person. We know that the first thing babies do when they are born is that they breathe. They take in the air that is vital to their survival. We all need to take in breath, and this air courses through our bodies, sustaining us and giving us energy. We cannot continue to live without breathing.

If any of you were here when we hosted our evening for the Chagrin Valley Council of Churches Lenten series, you may remember the short DVD we watched called "Breathe", which was produced by Rob Bell. (Produced by NOOMA©) In it, he explains that in Hebrew the name for God is essentially four letters. We would say Y,H,V,H, and that's where we get the name "Yahweh" for God. But in Hebrew, the letters are pronounced: "Yod, Heh, Vav, Heh." Some believed that the reason this was used as the name of God is that these are the sounds made by breathing: "Yod, Heh, Vav, Heh. Ultimately, for the Hebrew people, the name of God is so sacred, that they felt unworthy to even pronounce it. Yet it is so vital, that we say God's name constantly

by the very breaths we take. Every time we breathe, whether or not we're aware of it, we are breathing in and out the very name of God, the very essence of God's spirit.

There are times in our lives when we may be aware of the presence of God's spirit, just like there are times when we notice our breath. Perhaps in a quiet moment of prayer, or in a breath-taking view of nature, or in the company of loving friends or family, in a particularly moving experience, we might get a glimpse of and truly notice presence of the spirit. Occasionally we might use the expression that something phenomenal or awesome takes our breath away. We become aware of that need to breathe, so we are acutely conscious at these times of the spirit's movement.

But there are other times in our lives, when our breath is taken away by things like fear, shock, anger, or sadness. These are moments when we also need to **remember** to breathe, to take deep breaths in order to steady ourselves. And in doing so consciously and deliberately, we can remind ourselves that it is actually the breath of our ever-present, ever loving, ever comforting God which enters us and keeps us going.

We have all heard the expression about getting a second wind. When we feel like we're too tired to go on, when we are just drained and exhausted, and then suddenly, we receive a new energy, and we call it our second wind. It seems often we don't even know where it comes from. We just receive it as gift, and it gives us a strength, courage and energy we never knew. It sustains and strengthens us to go beyond what we alone could have done. It is the breath of God working through us.

Most of the time, however, in the course of our daily activities, we don't even realize that we are breathing, that we are actually breathing in God's spirit. Our breathing is so natural, so subconscious, that often, we are only aware of it when it is disrupted, or when we make a deliberate effort to notice. We know that our natural breathing consists of inhaling and exhaling. As we inhale, we can imagine God's spirit coming into us, giving us the wisdom, the courage, the energy, the many gifts of our Creator. We take this holy energy, this breath of God into ourselves, and then we exhale, we breathe out. So as we take in the spirit of God, we are also called to put out to the world that same spirit. Our words and deeds are to be inspired by this breath of God.

The celebration of the coming of the spirit, of Pentecost, is not a one day event. We are now entering the liturgical season of Pentecost, which actually takes us to Advent. This is the season in which we celebrate the birth of the church. So in this season, we focus on what it means to live as part of that church in the world today. We are given the spirit just like those disciples were, in order to carry on the work of Jesus: As the Rev. William Flippin, Jr. puts it: *This is our purpose. We are to be: a mouth to speak for Jesus; feet to run errands for Jesus, hands to do the work of Jesus, and a heart to love Jesus.* (The Rev. William E. Flippin, Jr., is senior pastor of St. Matthew Evangelical Lutheran Church in Columbus, GA.)

This season of Pentecost calls us to be aware of the breath of God, which courses through our bodies, giving energy, comfort and strength. As we breathe in this spirit, may we be open to all its gifts: its wisdom, guidance, its peace and its abiding presence. And knowing that we are given life, and sustained by that very breath of God, may we confidently go forward in gratitude, gracing the world with words and deeds inspired by this very spirit. Amen.