

1 Corinthians 12

No one can say, “Jesus is Lord,” except by the Holy Spirit. 4 There are different spiritual gifts but the same Spirit; 5 and there are different ministries and the same Lord; 6 and there are different activities but the same God who produces all of them in everyone. 7 A demonstration of the Spirit is given to each person for the common good. 8 A word of wisdom is given by the Spirit to one person, a word of knowledge to another according to the same Spirit, 9 faith to still another by the same Spirit, gifts of healing to another in the one Spirit, 10 performance of miracles to another, prophecy to another, the ability to tell spirits apart to another, different kinds of tongues[a] to another, and the interpretation of the tongues to another. 11 All these things are produced by the one and same Spirit who gives what he wants to each person.

12 Christ is just like the human body—a body is a unit and has many parts; and all the parts of the body are one body, even though there are many. 13 We were all baptized by one Spirit into one body, whether Jew or Greek, or slave or free, and we all were given one Spirit to drink.

Acts 2

When Pentecost Day arrived, they were all together in one place. 2 Suddenly a sound from heaven like the howling of a fierce wind filled the entire house where they were sitting. 3 They saw what seemed to be individual flames of fire alighting on each one of them. 4 They were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages as the Spirit enabled them to speak.

5 There were pious Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. 6 When they heard this sound, a crowd gathered. They were mystified because everyone heard them speaking in their native languages. 7 They were surprised and amazed, saying, “Look, aren’t all the people who are speaking Galileans, every one of them? 8 How then can each of us hear them speaking in our native language? 9 Parthians, Medes, and Elamites; as well as residents of Mesopotamia, Judea, and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, 10 Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the regions of Libya bordering Cyrene; and visitors from Rome (both Jews and converts to Judaism), 11 Cretans and Arabs—we hear them declaring the mighty works of God in our own languages!” 12 They were all surprised and bewildered. Some asked each other, “What does this mean?” 13 Others jeered at them, saying, “They’re full of new wine!”

14 Peter stood with the other eleven apostles. He raised his voice and declared, “Judeans and everyone living in Jerusalem! Know this! Listen carefully to my words! 15 These people aren’t drunk, as you suspect; after all, it’s only nine o’clock in the morning! 16 Rather, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel:

17 In the last days, God says,
I will pour out my Spirit on all people.
Your sons and daughters will prophesy.
Your young will see visions.
Your elders will dream dreams.

- 18 Even upon my servants, men and women,
I will pour out my Spirit in those days,
and they will prophesy.
- 19 I will cause wonders to occur in the heavens above
and signs on the earth below,
blood and fire and a cloud of smoke.
- 20 The sun will be changed into darkness,
and the moon will be changed into blood,
before the great and spectacular day of the Lord comes.
- 21 And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.

John 20

19 It was still the first day of the week. That evening, while the disciples were behind closed doors because they were afraid of the Jewish authorities, Jesus came and stood among them. He said, "Peace be with you." 20 After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. When the disciples saw the Lord, they were filled with joy. 21 Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father sent me, so I am sending you." 22 Then he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. 23 If you forgive anyone's sins, they are forgiven; if you don't forgive them, they aren't forgiven."

Sermon

May the words of my mouth and the meditation of all of our hearts be pleasing to you O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer:
Amen.

Jesus takes a deep breath, exhales on the disciples, and encourages them “receive the Holy Spirit.” Depending on Jesus’s breath, I’d imagine the disciples might want to respond, “receive a breath mint.” In all seriousness, this moment, this day, brings us to one of my most favorite parts of Christian theology, the presence and person of the Holy Spirit. What’s the big deal about the Holy Spirit? Why should we care about this wispiest of members of the Trinity?

Well, first off, the Holy Spirit is a dynamic character. Even in these three passages that we get today, we get three different images. Jesus connects the Holy Spirit to breath. Corinthians



connects the Holy Spirit to the gifts that God gives us, especially the gift of unity that binds us together as the Body of Christ. Acts connects the Holy Spirit to fire, as the mission of God burns to the ends of the earth. Now, while it's fun to imagine Jesus breathing fire and speaking Valyrian, as though he's one of Daenerys's dragons from Game of Thrones, we shouldn't just mash the metaphors together, though it sure is fun when we do. So instead, the best way to approach this is to consider the ways that the Holy Spirit acts in our lives. While the portions of fire, mission, and speaking in tongues are essential, and even related to one another, today let's explore the critical concept of breath. The Holy Spirit is the breath of Kingdom life.

In the first few chapters Genesis, we read that a great wind hovered over the waters, even before creation began. We also hear that, when God created humanity out of the dust of the earth, we didn't come alive until God breathed into us, gave us divine

mouth to mouth resuscitation, or since we weren't alive before, I suppose it just suscitation. You see, in Hebrew, the word for "wind" and "spirit" are the same. Many translations refer to that great wind over the chaotic preexistence of all things as the Spirit of God. It's God's spirit that hovers over the waters, and in the breath of God into Adam, the spirit of God that brings us life. Coincidentally, this is also why, in tradition Hebrew thought, life didn't begin at conception, but when the baby takes its first breath on its own. Breath and God's Spirit were so deeply connected with life that, without breath, there wasn't the fullness of life. Of course, this isn't all that far from our own experience. When we come upon someone who appears unconscious, the first thing we do is either check for a pulse or check for breath. It's impossible to have human life without breath. And the same is true with God, only more so: the breath of God creates life.

Jesus's point, then, becomes quite clear. You can't live Christ's life without Christ's spirit. Divine life is impossible without the divine breath of God living in us. The Holy Spirit is the breath that fills our physical lungs and the force that gives life not only to our spiritual existence, but the very existence of all creation. Just as any human body cannot live without breath, so without the Holy Spirit existence itself deflates. No wonder Psalm 139 wonders "where can I go from your spirit?" As long as there's breath in our lungs and life in our bodies, the Holy Spirit remains with us. With every breath, God's creating new life in us.

Of course, it's also quite true that we can breathe things into our bodies that aren't spirit, that aren't good wind. When we breathe in pollutants, whether from cigarettes or smog or asbestos, our bodies suffer the consequences. Asthma, cancer, mesothelioma, dis-eases of all sorts can all take root in our lungs. And how do we know they're diseases, that they don't belong?

They prevent us from breathing in the air that our bodies were meant to breathe. They make it difficult to process the oxygen that gives life to our blood. They make life more difficult, if not altogether impossible. When we too often breathe toxins, they poison our bodies and make the one thing that belongs in our lungs - God's good air - seem alien to our bodies.

The same is true of our spiritual existence. The more we breathe in other spirits instead of the Spirit of the Living God, the less we're able to take in of God's life-giving wind. This bears the weight of our examinations. Just think about how much more laborious it is to reenter a regular spiritual discipline like morning prayer or daily devotions after you've not done it for a few days, or weeks, or months, or years. We're not used to filling our lungs full of God's presence, so it's difficult to take in the fullness of what God has to offer. The more we focus on greed, it's tough to

embody God's generosity. The more we focus on lust for self-satisfaction, it's tough to live the self-sacrificial life of Christ.

And of course, the opposite is true as well. The deeper we breathe, the more air we're able to hold. One of my favorite parts of yoga is the intentionality upon our breath. We're so rarely encouraged to breathe deeply in our culture, so when we focus on drawing long breaths into the core of our bellies, we realize how much more air we can handle if we practice breathing. It sounds silly to practice something that comes natural, and yet we get better at breathing, which decreases our stress, increases blood flow throughout our bodies and oxygen to our brains. So when we attend to God's breath, when we inhale the Holy Spirit with intentionality, we begin to realize how much more of God we can handle. We begin to experience the powerful ways that God moves beyond the shallow breaths of presence that we typically draw in daily life. The more we focus on God's attributes, the more

we breathe in God's example, the more the life we live reflects the Holy Spirit's identity.

So the question for us becomes, what is Holy Spirit life? It's a life based in the creative and unifying force of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is a breath of God's creation and unity. Creativity and community are meant for one another. Every time we take a breath, more life is created in ourselves, and that newly created life helps to keep our bodies together.

The creativity of the Spirit manifests in multitudes of ways. We see these disciples speaking languages they've never before known, so we know that the Holy Spirit is miraculous. For us, perhaps we'll speak in new tongues. Or perhaps God's going to use us to speak to people in our own community that we've never engaged on deep levels. How could we become more creative in speaking to the people we see on a daily basis at the grocery store, the gas station, the drive through, the park, the rec center,

wherever we might be? We've seen some of this creativity bearing fruit with new ministries recently. We had more people at Self-Care Sunday than at worship a few weeks ago. We had new friends from the neighboring apartments join us for the first Fire Stories event on Friday. But we certainly should not stop. Where else is God calling us to be creatively communicating the call of the Gospel? Through these kinds of creativity, God's growing our community beyond the normal bounds of typical church.

Jesus breathes on us and gives us the creativity for forgiveness. Paul reminds us that, because we share in one Holy Spirit, God creates through us an everlasting, unified, Body of Christ to meet the needs of the world.

In other words, if we share the same breath, and are members of the same body, we're not meant for a life of division and strife. Pentecost is the season of the Holy Spirit breaking down the boundaries not only of language, but of race and

gender, sexuality and ability, of all things that separate the church and keep Christ's body fractured. The Holy Spirit binds us together across all these things, and the fire of the spirit burns down the walls of sin that separate us from a fuller experience of God's love.

That's why we moved back to the Confession and Forgiveness today, rather than staying with the Thanksgiving for Baptism. Part of being a spirit-filled community is learning to say when we've made mistakes and taking responsibility for those faults, because reconciliation requires responsibility. Confession itself is a breath of God's Spirit, for with confession we both admit our faults and embrace God's grace. Confession is perhaps the first deep breath of the Holy Spirit that allows God's rejuvenating wind to invigorate us with resurrection life, with Holy Spirit life. True community, full of relationships that respect the others with whom we live and serve as Christ's body, begins with the refreshing presence of God's spirit, which quenches any notions of

pride or self sufficiency and instead breaks open the truth that we're better off together, even, no, especially when, we face our failures, for the gifts that we lack are carried by other members of Christ's body. And the wounds that we bear may be mended by God's presence through these other images of God before us. And the wrong that we've done, when we admit it, may be forgiven not only by God, but by these others who bear God's word and work to us.

Let us then breathe deeper the presence of the Holy Spirit. Let's follow her lead to take risks of creativity and unity. Let's confess our sins and try new things, each of which might create new ties to people in the NRV and strengthen the bonds within God's church. May the Spirit of the Lord rise among us, and with it, may we rise to mission and ministry not just for this church, and not just for the church, but for all of God's creation. Amen.