

Welcome

How long can you hold your breath? A minute? A couple of minutes? The world record is about 7 minutes (which is pretty impressive). And a few crazy daredevils have found ways to hold their breath for almost 23 minutes (but it turns out that doing that very often can destroy your lungs and maybe your brain!).

That seems like a long time - 20 minutes holding your breath. But only because we need to breathe so regularly. Kids breathe an average of 20 times per minute, and adults take 12-18 breaths per minute.

That's a lot of breathing. And we never think about it. We just breathe in, breathe out. 20 or more times *per minute*. In 20 minutes, that means we breathe 300 times.

In a day? Over 20,000 times.

So 20 minutes isn't really *that* long in the scope of our day. The reality is if we didn't breathe all the time, we couldn't do anything. We wouldn't be able to function. There's a reason we don't go around trying to hold our breath all day. It makes everything harder!

Today is Pentecost Sunday. It's the birthday of the Church. Today we celebrate when the Holy Spirit was given to us.

So today we're going to be talking about the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is God, the third person of the Trinity, along with the Father and the Son. The Holy Spirit is the one who raised Jesus from the dead *and* the one who lives in and among us now, making us the Church!

We're going to talk about the Spirit as our spiritual breath today. We'll see that to try to live faithfully without the Spirit is the same as trying to live while holding our breath - it's not good for us, and it makes everything harder. Ultimately, we can't even do it.

But if we'll breathe in God's Holy Spirit, we'll find the power to be the people and the Church God has called us to be.

So since this is a birthday party, let's begin by singing and celebrating together that God is alive and living among us!

Message

The Holy Spirit is the person of the Trinity we have the hardest time with. We get God the Father, on the throne of Heaven. We understand Jesus, who became human, died and was raised from the dead. But the Spirit... well the Spirit is hard to make sense of. So we sort of just... forget about the Holy Spirit.

But the Holy Spirit is God, the third person of the Trinity. Coequal with, just as important as the Father and the Son. The Spirit matters. In fact, Pentecost is important because it's the day humanity received

the Holy Spirit. The Church is only the Church because of the Spirit. Without God the Holy Spirit living in and among us, we would just be some friends hanging out in a room singing songs (which is fun, but no different from a rock show in Deep Ellum).

We celebrate Pentecost in part because the stories of Pentecost help us understand why the Spirit is so important. The most famous story of Pentecost is Acts 2. It's got a windstorm and fire and all kinds of spectacular stuff.

But today, I want to look at another story of Pentecost, a different retelling of how we got the Spirit. This one's in John's gospel.

[Scripture Slide] Throughout John's story of Jesus, Jesus has been promising that when he leaves, the disciples won't be left alone, that through his very death and resurrection, Jesus will make a way for them to be with him. That way is revealed here, as the Holy Spirit living among them and within them.

John sets his story the night after the resurrection, when the disciples are still hiding in terror - none of them has seen Jesus yet. Pay special attention to *how* they receive the Spirit.

That Sunday evening the disciples were meeting behind locked doors because they were afraid of the Jewish leaders. Suddenly, Jesus was standing there among them! "Peace be with you," he said. As he spoke, he showed them the wounds in his hands and his side. They were filled with joy when they saw the Lord! Again he said, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I am sending you." Then he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone's sins, they are forgiven. If you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven." -- John 20:19-21

I'll come right out and say it. This is weird. Jesus says he's sending them into the world and then he breathes on them.

[Illustrate this?] Is he trying to blow them gently out the door?

Well, no... not exactly. To understand what Jesus is doing, we have to go back to Genesis, to the creation stories there.

John intentionally patterned his Jesus story on the creation stories in Genesis. Genesis opens with "In the beginning..." and so does John - the first words of his Gospel are "In the beginning was the Word" (who is Jesus).

Genesis 2 is all about how God planted a garden and put a man and a woman in it to take care of it. And after Jesus is raised from the dead (as the beginning of a new creation), the first encounter is Jesus (a man) meeting Mary Magdalene (a woman and the first Christian preacher!) in a garden.

In Genesis 2, God creates humans as a mixture of dust and breath. Matter and Spirit. In Hebrew (and Greek!) the word we translate as "Spirit" is the same as the word "breath". So yes, "Holy Spirit" can be "Holy Breath" or "Holy Wind".

When God created the first people, God breathed the Spirit of Life into us.

And now, after Jesus has been raised from the dead as the new Adam, the first human of a whole new creation, he breathes the Spirit of Life into us.

After Jesus has breathed the Holy Spirit into us, he sends us into the world. He tells us, "If we forgive sins, they are forgiven. If we don't forgive them, they are not forgiven."

Friends, that's a huge responsibility. We are God's representatives, ambassadors in the world. The world won't know God's forgiveness unless they experience it through us.

That's hard. It's hard to forgive when we've been wronged. It's hard to love people who are cruel to us. It's hard to make peace, to insist on kindness.

To follow the way of Jesus is difficult (we've seen that throughout our Eastertide series). The truth is, if it were up to us, none of us has what it takes to do this. But that's the good news of Pentecost: it's not up to us.

God has not left us alone to struggle in the new creation. God has given us the same Spirit that raised Jesus from the dead, to live in us, make us new and empower us to be like Jesus in the world.

The Spirit is our breath, as vital (necessary) to this new life God has given us as the air we breathe.

You can't live very long without breathing. Similarly, we don't have spiritual life when we're not breathing in God's life-giving Holy Spirit.

To try to live a life of faith without breathing in the Spirit is like trying to go about your day while holding your breath. You won't last very long, and it gets harder and harder as you go.

If we want a full life, the life God calls us to and equips us to live, we need to breathe in the Spirit every day.

This is what Spiritual Practices are all about. Since the beginning of the Church, we've identified practices and habits that help us remember to breathe in the Spirit. Practices like reading Scripture help us remember who God is and what it means to be God's image in the world. Prayer helps us listen for God, wait for God to direct us. Sabbath reminds us to rest and enjoy the life God calls us to. Fasting helps us say no to things that distract us from God's calling. And Giving helps us imitate God's generosity toward us by being generous toward others.

Each of these practices is a reminder to stop and breathe in God's Spirit, to turn to God for the power to be the people God calls us to be.

I can't tell you how often I forget to breathe in the Spirit. How often I get tired, worn down, and wonder why God feels so distant. And then I realize I've been holding my breath. Trying to go about my life, my calling, on my own power, my own energies.

When all the time, the same Holy Spirit that raised Jesus from the dead is there, with me, available to me. Waiting for me to stop and breathe in.

So I pause. I read some scripture and spend a few minutes meditating on it. I look for a way to be generous with my time or money. I carve out time to take a break.

I breathe in the Spirit, and suddenly I am not working on my own power anymore. Suddenly I have energy to keep going, press on, step up.

Friends, God has given us a job to do: we are the people of God in the world. We have to represent this God who loves the world and is rescuing the world. We have to be a source of unconditional love, freedom from sin, renewed and transformed lives, peace and forgiveness. We have to be these things because God is these things and we are God's representatives.

We have a big job to do. An important job to do. It's the same job the Church has had for the last 2,000 years. And honestly, we've not always been great at it.

Why? Because too often, we're holding our breath. We're ignoring the very power of the resurrection that is ours because of the good gift of God -- the gift of the Holy Spirit.

But the work to which God has called us is too important for us to go around holding our breath. We need the power of the Spirit working in and among us. We need the same Spirit that raised Jesus from the dead to live and work in us.

We need to breathe in.

Communion

[Communion Slide] At the table, God makes us new. God sends us into the world with the power of the resurrection.

1. When in the last week did I breathe in the Spirit?
2. When in the last week was I holding my breath?
3. When in the next week might I try to hold my breath?
4. How can I breathe in the Spirit this week?