

## The Breath of God

The Day of Pentecost. Year C, RCL. Acts 2:1-11. Psalm 104:25-32. Romans 8:14-17. John 14:8-17 (25-27). May 15, 2016. The Episcopal Shared Ministry of Our Saviour, Salem and Trinity, Alliance in the Diocese of Ohio. The Rev'd Jerome H. (Kip) Colegrove.

It does not take more than holding your breath for a while to come to an understanding of why breathing is important. Unless air gets in, life goes away.

The breath of air we take to live is a powerful way of talking about the way God creates and maintains living things. Speaking of the animals that fill the world, Psalm 104 says,

You hide your face, and they are terrified; you take away their breath, and they die and return to their dust.

You send forth your Spirit, and they are created; and so you renew the face of the earth.

Psalm 104:30-31, 1979 BCP

When Jesus breathes on his disciples and says, "Receive the Holy Spirit," he is creating a new thing, the Christian Church, which will renew the life of the world. The Church breathes the atmosphere of Heaven, the life of God.

But what if the Church forgot to take a breath, or what if it stopped breathing? This actually happens all the time. When I forget to pray, I have not let God's creative power into my life as fully as it could be, as it *needs* to be. When groups of Christians stop caring for one another or their neighbors in ways that show the love of God, they are forgetting to breathe.

The Holy Spirit is only offered; it is never forced down anyone's windpipe. We can refuse to breathe the pure, sweet air of God's salvation; we can refuse to let it fill our sails. The Spirit is offered again and again, powerfully at baptism and in the Holy Eucharist, just as powerfully in a simple prayer in somebody's bedroom in the middle of the night. The Spirit is offered in every call to do what Jesus did; what Jesus did is what he is sending us to do: pray, teach, worship and go about doing good.

Who will breathe in God's life *with intent*—with intent to glorify God and advance his purposes on Earth—who will do this if we don't? We know from reading God's word and from our own experience how urgently we need God's life, God's Spirit inside us. And there is plenty to go around. God is offering us the entire atmosphere of Paradise.

“As the Father has sent me, even so I send you,” says Jesus in the twenty-second verse of the twentieth chapter of the Gospel of John. Right after

he says that, Jesus breathes the Holy Spirit into his followers. That's how God works. Every sending involves a gifting. God doesn't send people to do his work without the tools they need, and the most essential tool for Christian service is the Holy Spirit. Unless the Holy Spirit is in our air tank, all the oxygen in the universe won't see us through to the end God has in mind for us.

We are called to pray in the Holy Spirit, to think and work in the Holy Spirit, to live move and have our being in the Holy Spirit. That is what makes the Church go. And where are we going? Wherever God wants us...to Heaven, in the end, by way of all sorts of paths both joyful and difficult. And beyond Heaven to the renewed Heaven and Earth promised in the last two chapters of the Book of Revelation. But we can start breathing the air of Heaven now. That's how we will know the way; that's how we will have the strength to keep going; that's how we will hear the music of angels on the wind.

❖ Slightly modified from the sermon preached at the Shared Ministry on May 23, 2010.