

Passionate Breathing is Holy Living

1 Pentecost C

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First Reading: Acts 2:1-21

Before Jesus ascended into heaven, he told his disciples they would be filled with the Holy Spirit. Now, amid signs of fire, wind, and a variety of languages, the people were amazed and astonished at Jesus' promise coming true.

¹When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. ²And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. ³Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. ⁴All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability. ⁵Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. ⁶And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each. ⁷Amazed and astonished, they asked, "Are not all these who are speaking Galileans?" ⁸And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language? ⁹Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, ¹⁰Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jewish-born and proselytes, ¹¹Cretans and Arabs—in our own languages we hear them speaking about God's deeds of power." ¹²All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, "What does this mean?" ¹³But others sneered and said, "They are filled with new wine." ¹⁴But Peter, standing with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed them, "You Judeans and all who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and listen to what I say. ¹⁵Indeed, these are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only nine o'clock in the morning. ¹⁶No, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel: ¹⁷'In the last days it will be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your youth shall see visions, and your elders shall dream dreams. ¹⁸Even upon my slaves, both men and women, in those days I will pour out my Spirit; and they shall prophesy. ¹⁹And I will show portents in the heaven above and signs on the earth below, blood, and fire, and smoky mist. ²⁰The sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood, before the coming of the Lord's great and glorious day. ²¹Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.'

Gospel: John 14:8-17 [25-27]

Though the disciples struggle with Jesus' nature and identity, they receive the promise that they too will be identified with God and God's mission. Though he must leave them now, Jesus promises the coming of the Advocate whom God will send to comfort and enlighten them.

⁸Philip said to Jesus, "Lord, show us the Father, and we will be satisfied." ⁹Jesus said to him, "Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and you still do not know me? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'?" ¹⁰Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own; but it is the Father who dwells in me who does these works. ¹¹Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; but if you do not, then believe me because of the works themselves. ¹²Very truly, I tell you, the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these, because I am going to the Father. ¹³I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. ¹⁴If in my name you ask me for anything, I will do it.

¹⁵"If you love me, you will keep my commandments. ¹⁶And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever. ¹⁷This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees nor knows that Spirit. You know that Spirit, because that Spirit abides with you, and will be in you. ²⁵"I have said these things to you while I am still with you. ²⁶But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you. ²⁷Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid."

Overview - What Does This Mean?

"What does this mean?" the devout ask (Acts 2:12). For those gathered in that house, the event meant the birth of sudden, surprising, unmerited new life. Filled with the Holy Spirit, they burst from the house with a story to share about God's wonders. But what does this event of Pentecost mean for us, today, many centuries later? God is at work here, now, in the world. Through the gift of the Holy Spirit, the Advocate, God is walking alongside as friend, truth-teller, comforter, and guide. The writer of John's gospel speaks of it in this way: the Advocate, the one whom the Father will send, will teach the disciples everything they need to know. God is not yet finished revealing who God is, and the disciples are not yet finished learning. Through the Spirit of truth, the disciples will do the work of Jesus, and his life will continue through them. In holy baptism, the Spirit rests on the heads of young and old alike. Filled with the Holy Spirit, the baptized have an old, old story to tell of Jesus and his love—and a new, new story

of how God is birthing sudden, surprising, and unmerited new life all around us, every day. God is at work, here, now in the world through the lives of everyday Christians. Jesus' work continues through the lives of all the baptized. We discover meaning from this Pentecost story today, not only for our own sake but for the sake of the world that so hungers for this life.

Illustration

Philip asks Jesus to show the disciples the Father. In his response Jesus includes the encouragement to focus on the things they can see: his works. Road construction signs are a regular feature of our highways and local streets. At times one may see a "Road Work Ahead" or "Workers Ahead" sign but no evidence of construction. At the same time, one does not need signs to know road work is happening if there are piles of dirt, freshly laid asphalt, or workers present on the roadway. In what ways are our works as the body of Christ signs that point to God's grace? In what ways are our works part of constructing God's grace in the world?

Illustration

Legal thrillers are novels or films belonging to a genre where lawyers find themselves advocating for justice on behalf of people who are suffering at the hands of the wealthy, the powerful, the criminal, or a corrupt justice system. The lives of the clients and lawyers are often at risk. Today's gospel includes the optional verses (John 14:25-27) in which Jesus promises that the Holy Spirit will come as the Advocate. Imagine the gospel as a legal thriller in which Jesus gives up his life to win the case for his client (humanity) and God sends the Holy Spirit to continue to advocate for peace and grace on behalf of those whose case has been won.

Theological Reflection

We tend to think of language as something that is more or less settled. Technology may introduce new words now and again, but we are shaped by culture with certain lenses of language and understanding. Some have struggled to keep up with the real shifts in language and understanding that are happening around us all the time. This may express itself as frustration with "political correctness" or confusion about how we might refer to people who are different from us. The Pentecost story finds the Holy Spirit speaking through the Galileans to a whole collection of other languages and cultures. How might this text be used as an opportunity to explore God's presence in

the shifting language around human sexuality, gender identity, race, developmental differences, and other sensitive areas of our shared language and conversation?

Theological Reflection

If . . . (Questions for the Game of Life), by Evelyn McFarlane and James Saywell (New York: Villard Books, 1995), is a book full of “if” questions, both serious and silly. It invites people to wonder how they might change themselves, the world, or history. It prompts readers to imagine who they would spend time with and where they would go if time and space were boundless. Jesus tells the disciples he will do anything if they ask for it in his name. This promise begins with “if.” It is easy to think of this invitation as boundless, but the “if” part of the promise should cause us to ponder what it means to ask in Jesus’ name. Should our requests be consistent with Jesus’ mission and proclamation? We may ask for revenge, for example, but can we honestly ask for that in the name of Jesus? Thinking of this “if” as having some limits does not mean grace is qualified, for those very limits are a gift of grace that invites us into the ways Jesus would have us walk.

[John 14:8-17 \[25-27\]](#)

In this excerpt from the farewell discourses (chap. 14–17), the 4th evangelist proclaims early trinitarian theology: God Father, experienced in the life of Jesus, is now operative through the Spirit of truth. Referring to God as Father was rare among Jews but commonplace in Roman paganism, in which Jupiter was “Father of fathers.” “In my name” means under the authority of. “Advocate” is the NRSV translation of *parakletos*, a Greek term for one’s advocate in court, a legal mediator. Advocate is a divine title found in the New Testament only in the Johannine literature. The passage conveys to the late first-century community that although Jesus is no longer present with them, God’s power through the Spirit is. The gospel of John is appointed for most of the primary festivals of the liturgical year because of John’s high Christology and its centrality in the development of Christian doctrine. John says theologically the narrative of Pentecost: God sends the Spirit into the gathered community so that it can know the truth of Christ’s resurrection. Christian theology subsumed John’s description of the Advocate into its understanding of the Holy Spirit, and passages such as this led to the development of the doctrine of the Trinity. The Spirit is now the link between the believing community and God.

Acts 2:1-21

Once again Luke presents a narrative to convey theological meaning. The fire and wind, associated with God's presence on Mount Sinai, are now experienced in the assembly of believers, and miraculous events, seen in the ministry of Jesus, occur now in the church. Acts is moving the church into all the ends of the earth, and Acts 2 begins this multilingual proclamation. Luke cites the apocalyptic vision of the prophet Joel to authenticate the power of God among the leaders of the church. By "tongues" Luke refers to actual languages that were spoken in the Greco-Roman world. The narrative of Pentecost exemplifies Luke's expert storytelling ability. The reading includes hidden references to the Hebrew Bible, a citation from the prophets, a contemporary geography lesson, an account of miracles, and the folksy detail of the accusation of drunkenness. As we await the eschatological end of all things, we are now those who prophesy, see visions, and dream dreams. Although some Christians connect glossolalia with Pentecost, Luke describes these "tongues" as other languages with which to evangelize the whole world. Christians have sought to do just this, even reducing many oral languages to writing so as to be able to create a written text of the Bible.

Day of Pentecost

Fifty days after Passover, Jews kept the Pentecost festival, which originally celebrated the wheat harvest but had become the commemoration of the giving of the law on Mount Sinai. As the fiftieth day of Easter, Christians maintained the festival, altering its focus to a celebration of the Spirit of the risen Christ in the church. In an oblique reference to Sinai, the fire of God's word is now on the foreheads of the faithful. In John's gospel, the Spirit brings the truth of God into the believing community. In current parlance, Pentecost concludes the Easter season and lasts one day; it is not an on-going season (*Evangelical Lutheran Worship* pp. 14, 37)

Images in the Readings

Anthropologists describe **fire** as one of the markers of the human species. For tens of thousands of years, humans gathered around fire for light, warmth, protection, community, and better food. Many passages in the Bible liken God to fire. The Holy Spirit of God appeared on Sinai in flames of fire, which on Pentecost appeared on the forehead of each believer. Moses experienced God in fire; through fire the Israelites presented offerings to God; God led the people through the wilderness with a pillar of

fire. Seraphim are fire-spirits, extensions of the divine. Yet fire is also a sign of divine judgment: the angel in Eden hides the tree of life from humanity with a sword of fire, and John the Baptist predicts that fire will consume the chaff. Fire both occasions human life and has the power to destroy. Think fire, think God. The Hebrew noun *ruah* can be translated into English as **spirit**, breath, or wind. Spirit is the most amorphous of these words. In Christian theology, the Spirit that we experience is the Spirit of the risen Christ, a spirit of service, a spirit of love, a spirit of resurrection beyond death.

Ideas from the Text:

- 1) Breath is necessary for the body to live. What takes your breath away? What does that actually mean? When does it happen in life? Do you realize how you talk and interact with others can also help to take their 'breath away' – or more accurately become so aware of the presence of God in the moment so that they can experience even more of an experience of "being/feeling alive!" (You can help create those moments)
- 2) ***Ruach*** is the Hebrew word that means Spirit or presence of God – it that which hovered over the waters at Creation and was breathed into the clay to give life. ***Yahweh*** is considered God's name – the name given to Moses when God was asked by him for his name. It was considered too sacred to even say. In the Hebrew pronunciation of this tetragrammaton, it is literally the taking in of a breath (*Yah* – the sound of inhaling; *weh* – the sound of exhaling). To breathe is to say the name of God from the day you are born until the day you die, God's name is on your lips.