

The Light and Breath of the Spirit

- [Acts 2:1-21](#)
- [John 20:19-23](#)

Today is Pentecost, the day when the disciples were empowered to be much more than they had ever imagined, the day when the church was born. Just as the Holy Spirit was there hovering over the waters at the creation of the cosmos, so too the Spirit hovers over and infills the people of God bringing something new. The apostle Paul calls it the New Creation. The church, that's us, is the beginning of the new creation, the beginning of a whole new world.

Yet notice that we have two very different accounts of the coming of the Holy Spirit: in the first one from Acts there are tongues like fire and a great wind and then the disciples are transformed – instead of huddling together for safety, they are out in the streets preaching in the languages of all the pilgrims to Jerusalem that day. They are so excited that people think they must be drunk. In the second account, the Gospel reading from John, Jesus breathed on them and said “Receive the Holy Spirit.”

Two very different accounts – so which one is true? If we think of truth as fact then there is no way of knowing whether either of them is true. But if we think of truth as the reality beyond or behind fact, then they are both true! The Bible is not one book that makes sense when you read it from beginning to end; it is a collection of books that combined give us our faith narrative. Yet it contains different voices and this is one clear example.

Whenever the voices of the Bible differ, it is an exciting place for the Holy Spirit to enter our thinking. Rather than contorting ourselves to try to make apparently contradictory accounts the same, these places challenge us to go beyond our everyday thinking. The Holy Spirit came like the gentle breath of a dear friend; the Holy Spirit came like a

rushing wind and flames of fire. In Hebrew and in Greek the word for spirit is the same as the word for breath and also for wind.

Jesus told Nicodemus, “The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit.” The Holy Spirit is the breath of God, we may feel it but we cannot see it and we can never control it. But like a sailor we can trim our sails so that we are carried along and given power to go in the direction the Spirit is going.

As many of you know, I lived for several years in the Findhorn Community in Scotland. The community was founded by three people who lived together and paid attention to the clear guidance that one of the, Eileen Caddy, received every day. As the community grew, they would gather each morning for meditation and to hear what Eileen’s guidance said. Then one day the guidance said there would be no more guidance. It was time for the community to discern the movement of Spirit for itself.

And that is where we are today. For the past 17 years I have prayed to hear the Spirit of God and every Sunday and every time we met, I have given it my best shot. I have shared with you what I was learning and what I was hearing both among you and in my own heart. And I will miss doing that. You will have other preachers who will bring you the best that they can hear of the Spirit’s movement but it will not be as deeply grounded in the communal life of St. Benedict’s as I have been.

And that is a good thing.

It will open space for new perspectives, new thoughts to be shared. It opens the possibility for the Holy Spirit to blow through this place in directions that I cannot conceive. Just as when Eileen’s guidance ended, it was time for the community to discern the movement of the Spirit for itself, so it is now time for you all to discern the movement of the Spirit

in this place. I wonder whether it will be more like the explosive energy of Pentecost or the gentle breath of Jesus?

Both have their place and time. Back in the 1970s, there was a charismatic revival which brought speaking in tongues and the gifts of the Spirit described in our second reading this morning into the forefront of Christian experience. In the Episcopal church it started in Van Nuys, California and spread rapidly. It was an exciting time of revival meetings, miracles and rumors of miracles, speaking and singing in tongues. I have often wondered why that did not continue in that way. There are of course still Episcopalians who privately speak in tongues, and quiet miracles happen all the time. But that big exciting Pentecost experience is rare outside the Pentecostal churches.

Jesus said, “The wind blows where it pleases.” The Spirit moves as she pleases. My prayer is that in this interim time, you will discern the Spirit of God moving among you and moving you, the people of St. Benedict’s, further along the path that God has prepared for you to walk in.

I have been spending a lot of time recently trying to make sure that the practical details of how the church functions are handled. I am very grateful to Cathy Gildea who, on behalf of the Parish Council and Transition Committee, has been encouraging and coaching me for months on what I need to write down and pass on. But still I procrastinated. And so this has been a very busy time.

But this morning I want to reflect, not on the practical details of who does what with what and to whom, but on the inner work. The work of attuning with Spirit, of noticing where the wind is blowing and trimming our sails accordingly; and the work of sharing the presence of God beyond these walls.

This is work that takes place in our hearts and also in community. In Acts the disciples were “all together in one place” when the Spirit came, and in John they were gathered behind locked doors when Jesus came and breathed on them.

St. Benedict’s has an over-lighting being, a guardian angel if you will, and her name is Gloria. She is nurtured by our worship and praise of God and she nurtures it in turn. Whenever I tune into her, she responds with energy in the worship of God. As I have said before, I have come to believe that the energy that animates the universe is the praise of God. As we praise God in our music, in our words, in our hearts and in our actions we are tuning in to the universal energy, and as you tune into Gloria, St Ben’s over-lighting being, she will both grow in energy herself and also assist you in the most important work of our lives, praising God.

Our inner work is powerful and makes a difference. Everything we create starts with the inner impulse and direction. As we use our imaginations and intuition to create on the inner, so it becomes an outer reality. This is part of the power of prayer.

I invite you to join with me in a short meditation. You will want to get comfortable, with your spine as upright as you can make it without strain. I recommend that you close your eyes or else focus gently on something in front of you.

Take a few deep breaths...

Allow yourself to go to the place inside that feels like home...

And now imagine a beam of silver light linking your heart with the hearts of the people sitting closest to you... and send them love...

In your mind’s eye see all those beams of light connecting up so that we are creating a circle of pulsating light and love...

And let's include in our circle those watching at home and others whom we love who are not here this morning for one reason or another...

And into our circle we invite and welcome the Spirit of God. You might imagine the Spirit as a ball of golden light which grows and grows, merging with our circle infusing it with energy...

And soon the whole sanctuary is filled with the light of God's love...

The whole building is filled with light...

We can imagine that if we looked at the church from outside it would be glowing with the light of the Spirit...

And people seeking God would be drawn to that light, to that love, to the Spirit of God...

And now let us send the light out as a blessing... to the east to the people of San Luis Obispo, south to Avila and Diablo Canyon, west to the people of Los Osos and of Morro Bay, and north to Atascadero and beyond... sending God's love to all who have need of it...

Sending our blessing out to God's world...

And when you are ready, let the light go and gradually return to this room...

Thank you