

**He Breathed on Them****PENTECOST**

May 28, 2023

**John 20:19-23**

*<sup>19</sup>When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you.”<sup>20</sup>After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord.<sup>21</sup>Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.”<sup>22</sup>When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit.<sup>23</sup>If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.”*

**Acts 2:1-21**

*<sup>1</sup>When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place.<sup>2</sup>And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting.<sup>3</sup>Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them.<sup>4</sup>All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.*

*<sup>5</sup>Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem.<sup>6</sup>And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each.<sup>7</sup>Amazed and astonished, they asked, “Are not all these who are speaking Galileans?”<sup>8</sup>And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language?*

*<sup>9</sup>Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia,<sup>10</sup>Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes,<sup>11</sup>Cretans and Arabs — in our own languages we hear them speaking about God’s deeds of power.”*

<sup>12</sup> All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, “What does this mean?” <sup>13</sup> But others sneered and said, “They are filled with new wine.” <sup>14</sup> But Peter, standing with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed them, “Men of Judea and all who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and listen to what I say. <sup>15</sup> Indeed, these are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only nine o’clock in the morning. <sup>16</sup> No, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel: <sup>17</sup> ‘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 young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams. <sup>18</sup> Even upon my slaves, both men and women, in those days I will pour out my Spirit; and they shall prophesy. <sup>19</sup> And I will show portents in the heaven above and signs on the earth below, blood, and fire, and smoky mist. <sup>20</sup> The sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood, before the coming of the Lord’s great and glorious day. <sup>21</sup> Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.’



Today on Pentecost Sunday we delve into two Pentecost stories – one from John 20 and one from Acts 2. One is more personal, and one is more corporate. Both are accounts of

the earliest followers of Jesus receiving the Holy Spirit. And we can relate to both stories. There are times when the Holy Spirit comes to each of us – maybe in a whisper, maybe with a nudge – leading and guiding us. There are times when we speak words that are not our words, words that can only come through the Spirit. And there are also times when the Holy Spirit feels alive and present amongst us. For me, this is often in worship. It is when we gather together, to pray and sing and to share the word, that the Spirit can bring forth joy and celebration, at times even overwhelming us, bringing tears to our eyes. But it is not confined to this hour on Sunday morning.

I've experienced this power and presence on mission trips, in Bible studies, in hospital rooms as I've gathered with families, and in my own quiet time each morning. The Spirit can and will show up anywhere. That is the promise. As we spend time exploring these two Pentecost stories, let us pray...

Please turn with me to John 20 as we dive into the disciples' Holy Spirit experience. Just prior to our passage for today, Mary Magdalene has encountered Jesus, returning to the disciples to announce, *"I have seen the Lord."* That evening, on that first Easter Sunday, Jesus appears to the disciples. Moving beyond the locked doors and past their fear of the Jews, Jesus comes and stands among them. To this fearful and anxious group, Jesus says, *"Peace be with you."* In today's passage, the disciples are in shock, they are scared, they are filled with fear. They are men in need of Jesus' peace. But this isn't the first time that Jesus has offered his peace to the disciples.



Earlier, in John 14, when he was speaking of the promised sending of the Holy Spirit, the Advocate, he said to them, *"Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you."* As Jesus spoke of his impending death, it felt surreal. It felt impossible. Into the fear that was rising up in the disciples as they considered life without Jesus, he offers them peace. In the first offering, in John 14, it came upon the threshold of death. In the second, in John 20, it came in the light of the resurrection. There is a connection between peace and receiving the Holy Spirit.



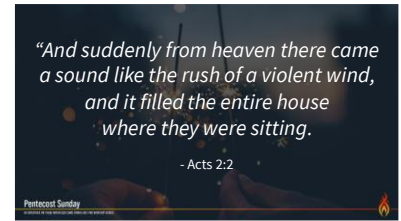
To give the disciples some reassurance, Jesus then shows them his hands and his side. A little physical proof to set their minds at ease. This leads to the disciples rejoicing. Then Jesus again offers them his peace, followed by a commission. In verse 21 Jesus says to the disciples, *“Peace be with you. As the father has sent me, so I send you.”* Having laid out the task now at hand, he continues, breathing on them as he says, *“Receive the Holy Spirit.”* In a breath, Jesus fills them with his power and presence. With the indwelling power and presence of Christ inside their hearts, the disciples will be sent out into the world, proclaiming the good news of salvation and resurrection.



Turn with me to Acts 2 as we jump ahead in the story. 50 days have passed since Jesus' resurrection. 10 days have passed since he ascended back into heaven. On this day the disciples

and the other followers of Jesus are gathered together in Jerusalem. Not much has happened since Jesus ascended – except the resurrected Jesus is no longer amongst them. The hope that was renewed in them as the risen Jesus was among them was now ten days old. Maybe they were starting to feel as they had felt that Saturday after Jesus was crucified. Maybe the 'Now what's?' were beginning to resurface. Take a moment and consider what it would feel like to be in that room. Can you feel the old fears coming back? Can you sense the doubt rising up? Jesus was killed and then he was back in a new way and now he is gone again.

*“And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting.”* The wind, the movement, the spirit, it filled the house, and it shook them. Maybe it sounded like a violent desert windstorm. Or maybe to us it would sound like a freight train rolling by your window at night. It must have made them sit up and take notice. Something powerful was happening. Others notice too.



Jerusalem is filled with Jews from all over the world. They are in town to celebrate one of the holy festivals – the harvest festival. Over time this festival has come to include other things, but in the context of this passage it was one of the three ‘pilgrim’ festivals that the Jews celebrated. Sheaves of the winter crop, barley, were brought to the temple from Passover until Shavuot, fifty days later. Then, on Shavuot the Israelites would bring the first fruits of the harvest, celebrating God’s blessings upon the people.

The sound of the mighty, rushing wind draws a crowd. Meanwhile, inside that room, *“Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.”* This is what the crowd outside hears.



These Jews from all over the world hear people speaking in their native languages. They are *“bewildered.”* Imagine once again, being in that room though. The *“rush of the violent wind”* is replaced by what looks like divided tongues of fire, one settling on each of the believers. As you looked around the room and saw the divine resting on everyone, what would’ve gone through your mind?

Now, these divided tongues. They did not create division. This is not an individual receiving of the Spirit. Yes, individuals did receive the Holy Spirit. But this day, this day is about the community of faith receiving the gift. Like this picture, imagine a weaving of tongues of fire, arms settling on each person there that day. Think of an enormous octopus reaching out hundreds of tentacles, each one connecting to a person in that room. Connecting to each one personally, yet still interconnected to the source of the power, to God, and also connected to one another. That is Pentecost. That is the gift of the Holy Spirit that all believers receive, at once becoming one in Christ.

The day of Pentecost – it was fire and power; it was chaos and noise; and it was meaning and hope and promise fulfilled. The first manifestation was the speaking in tongues. This let both those inside the room and those drawn to the place, those Jews outside, know that the gift of the Holy Spirit was for the community first and foremost. Those inside spoke in many languages and those outside heard “*about God’s deeds and power,*” each in their own language. They were amazed and perplexed. How is it possible that this rabble of Galileans were speaking in languages from all over the world? They asked, “*What does this means?*” Many sensed God at work. And some doubted. There is often a mix of these two – belief and doubt – when the Spirit shows up.

Those inside the room were filled with power from above. Power from above that was now inside of them. It is this power within that enables Peter to rise to address the crowd. Peter goes Jewish on them. In verses 17-21 Peter quotes from the prophet Joel. He is connecting this bewildering and perplexing event into something that these Jews know, to something that they are familiar with.

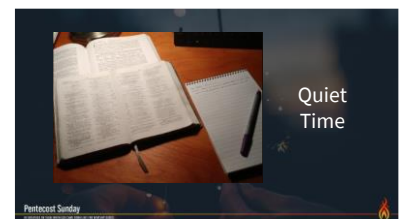
When Peter equated this Pentecost experience with Joel's words about how God will *"pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream*

God will *"pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams"*  
- Acts 2:17 (and Joel 2:28)

*dreams"* he is telling his audience that this event today is the fulfillment of that scripture and that prophesy. This moment of power and presence and transformation – Peter is telling them that Joel's words are being lived out right then, right there. Peter is telling them that God is present in power and in might. The sound, the violent wind – that was the first sign. Speaking in languages that has been previously unknown to these believers, that was the second sign. Connecting into Joel's prophesy, written some 800 years earlier, that was the third sign of God's presence.

Our passage ends with these words: *"Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."* It was true that day. Later in chapter 2, in verse 41, Luke reports that about 3,000 people were added to the church that day. This powerful experience, followed by some Spirit-inspired preaching by Peter, it led many to Christ. It all began as the risen Christ breathed on them, on the disciples. Filled with the Spirit, the twelve are changed. Fear is replaced by trust. Anxiousness is covered by presence. Doubt succumbs to faith. *"Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."* It was true that day. It remains true for you and for me.

In what practical and real ways can we, as followers of Christ, call on the name of the Lord every day, inviting the Spirit of Christ to breathe on us daily? There are several answers to this question, but the one I want to focus on this morning is quiet time with the Lord.



It will be the focus of our discipleship study this Wednesday night. Daily quiet time, I believe, is essential to our spiritual life. Methodism's founder, John Wesley, also believed this means of grace was essential to the Christian faith. In the scriptures, we see that Jesus "frequently withdrew to lonely places" to spend time with God. Even with overwhelming demands on his time, Jesus regularly made quiet time with God a top priority. Moses would be another great example of a leader who frequently spent quiet time with God, whether interceding for the people or whether seeking God's direction and guidance.

For this series and the next, I will be drawing from 4 books about John Wesley and early Methodism. Wesley's beliefs and practices give shape and form to the Methodist church and to our lives of faith. So it is fitting to draw upon our Wesleyan roots as we talk about discipleship this summer. In A Wesleyan Spiritual Reader author Rueben Job writes this about John Wesley: "He believed that the 'primitive [or early] church' drew its guidance from the Bible and the activity of the Holy Spirit within the community of believers" (page 22).

For me, this personal time with God happens each morning. After a time of prayer, I spend time thanking God for the blessings of the day before and then I read a few devotionals and I read from the Bible. In this time, the Spirit is fully present, leading and guiding my thoughts, my writing, my prayers. For me, this is one way to practice Wesley's desire to "draw closer to God and to live in greater faithfulness to God" (page 22). To find a significant quiet time each day to be with the Lord, whether in the morning or evening or anytime in between, is a practice that will change your faith. It certainly had changed my faith.



As Job writes on page 23, Wesley “believed that God would provide the necessary direction and power to live a life of holiness.” And, for me, beginning each day this way brings direction and power plus a lot of peace and joy.

We remember that when the risen Jesus came to the disciples, he first brought his peace and then he breathed the Holy Spirit on them. Last Sunday, we were reminded that Jesus still offers us his peace. As we cast our fears and doubts and worries on Christ, because he cares for us, Jesus takes them upon himself. On Monday, I gathered the hearts that were on the cross. I laid them out on the altar in the chapel. I spent some time in the chapel reading and praying through the words and phrases that we want to give to God. Much like the Spirit at Pentecost that rested on each person - a concrete visual that the Spirit is in every single person – each heart on the cross represents an individual, each with its own cares, worries, fears...



There were some common themes and there were some specific offerings to God. Taken as a whole, though, these hearts represent our unity and our connection to one another. Just as the Spirit united the believers, so too are all these hearts clinging to the cross or laying on the altar in the chapel a symbol of the unity that we can find in the church and as the body of Christ. These hearts are also evidence that we, the church, continue to need Christ’s Spirit to breathe upon us, bringing hope and peace into our lives.

It is a struggle to live and love well in the world. What was written on these hearts bears the truth of this statement. Much around us and in our lives feels broken. Much in our world and much in our lives feels out of alignment with God’s will and way.

This was evident as I prayed through and over your words written on these hearts. So we ask today for God's Spirit to breathe on us, to fill us with God's power and presence.

Giving our cares or worries or fears to God did not remove the situation or circumstance, but it did say to God that we believe that God can handle these cares, worries, fears. It said we do not need to carry these on our own. With that same humility and surrender we come today, asking God to breathe on us just as Christ breathed on the disciples, to grant us the peace that we need to continue on this journey of life and faith.



We plead with God for the peace of mind and heart to mend what is broken. We ask for the strength of the Spirit to face our trials and sufferings with grace from Christ, with confidence in God, and with guidance from the Holy Spirit. May we find a peace that lifts one another up, that binds us together as one with the Lord, and that casts out all of our fears. Breath on us, O breath of God. Fill us with your power and presence. And then send us forth into the world, leaning and trusting into your power, sharing your love and joy and peace with a world in need. May it be so for each of us this week. Amen and amen.

### **GPS – Grow, Pray, Study**

- 1) *Grow*. As you think back over your recent faith journey, when has the Spirit breathed on you? How did it lead or guide or direct your life or decisions?
- 2) *Pray*. Where does the Spirit need to fall in your life? Pray for God's action.
- 3) *Study*. Read Acts 2:37-42. What do you think led these Jews to be "cut to the heart?" What was Peter's response? How might this one day be your response?