

Spirit Powered: 2. Breathe Out
Acts 2:1-11
May 9, 2021
Pastor Steve Richards

Once again, this morning, let's take a moment to breathe. Breathe in. Breathe out. Deep breath – in and out. We breathe 8-14 times a minute. That's 17,280 times a day. The average person reaches their peak respiratory and lung capacity in their mid-20s. That capacity declines by 10-25% for every decade of life unless we do something to improve our breathing capacity. Most of us do not breathe properly. Breathing is something we were born able to do and we rarely think about it. Most of us breathe from our chest instead of our diaphragm. I remember learning this in college. I took voice lessons as part of my music major, and during one of my lessons because I kept breathing and singing from my chest instead of my diaphragm, my teacher told me to lay on the floor. For the next 30 minutes, I sang from the floor because by lying on the floor, it forced me to use my diaphragm – try that at home! As a result, I found my voice.

This is our second week in a series on the Holy Spirit. In the Bible, the word, spirit, also means breath. Holy Spirit is God's holy breath. In the Genesis story of creation when God created the human, God breathed into that human the breath of life and he came to life. I've often thought of the words of the 20th century French priest, Teilhard de Chardin: **"We are not human beings having a spiritual experience. We are spiritual beings having a human experience."** In this series on the Holy Spirit, we are in search of a more intimate relationship with God, possible only when we allow God's Spirit, God's breath to enter in. Maybe that's what the creation story is telling us. We cannot be fully alive unless the breath of God is in us.

Last week, we learned that God has a gift for us, and that gift is the Holy Spirit, but we've got to wait for it and that waiting will take desire and discipline. We must surrender and be baptized. The Greek word for baptized is *baptismo*, a word that means to bury. I bury my wants, my desires, my will. That's my commitment to God. The Holy Spirit is God's commitment to me. And when my commitment comes together with God's commitment, that's power. It's what happened in today's scripture. Forty days after the resurrection, Jesus ascended to heaven – and the disciples began praying, constantly for the gift that Jesus promised, not knowing what form that gift would be and on the tenth day, the tenth day of constant prayer, the Holy Spirit came.

We are in the book of Acts, chapter two, verse one. **When Pentecost Day arrived, they were all together in one place.** All together. That's just the opposite from what these past 14 months have been – and the isolation, the inability to be together or even when we are to keep our distance and wear our masks. We understand why but even the most introverted persons among us are feeling empty. We had a memorial service on Friday and when we could step outside, it felt so good to remove our masks and greet each other. People I had been used to greeting at least once a week and it had been 14 months. We need each other. When the Holy Spirit comes into our lives – when we are born of the Spirit, we are also born into the body of Christ – because God knows we cannot be disciples, we cannot live in the path of discipleship all by ourselves. To be part of Christ, I have to be connected to you. It's not an option – and you have to be connected to me. How many of us were raised in a family? How many of us who no longer lives with that family are still influenced by that family? Like it or not, we are shaped by other people, and if we are part of Christ, then we need Christ's body, the church, to shape us. We will live into the practice of the community we are in.

A few years ago, when Amanda was diagnosed with cancer, people began showing up at our front door with meals, others sent us gifts cards, or order meals to be delivered. One morning I

looked outside, and someone was mowing our yard and he kept showing up for weeks to mow our yard. Others came to weed Amanda's flower garden. One Saturday in October, an army of people descended on our yard and what would have taken me weeks to complete was accomplished in an hour and a half. For months, people kept showing up, and we didn't ask for any of this. It was part of living in community. The Holy Spirit makes us one with each other. I cannot live without you. You cannot live without me spiritually.

Verse 2: **Suddenly a sound from heaven like the howling of a fierce wind filled the entire house where they were sitting.** They were not only with each other, but suddenly they were with God. The same Greek word for breath and spirit also means wind. The bible uses wind to identify the presence of God. In Exodus when the Israelites in Egypt were set free and were running toward the Red Sea with Pharaoh's army in pursuit. What happened? God showed up as wind and parted the Red Sea. Luke was telling us that God was present. Verse 3: **They saw what seemed to be individual flames of fire alighting on each one of them.** Fire is also a sign of God's presence. Remember when God spoke to Moses, it was from a burning bush – fire. Here the fire of Spirit of God rests on each individual person. And Luke says, **They were all filled with the Holy Spirit.**

What is the Holy Spirit? Jesus describes the Holy Spirit in the gospel of John, the 14th chapter, verse 18: **I won't leave you as orphans. I will come to you.** And then in verse 26: [slide] **The Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything and will remind you of everything I told you.** Jesus will send the Advocate. What's an advocate? Someone who works on your behalf. When you ask God for the wrong thing, the Holy Spirit changes that to the right thing. In the Holy Spirit, you have Jesus as your Advocate. Jesus comes in this new birth as the person of the Holy Spirit.

What does the Holy Spirit do for us? In John 16, Jesus says: **When he comes, he will show the world it was wrong about sin, righteousness, and judgment.** He will show what's wrong, not to tear you down or punish but for your well-being to shine a light on what's wrong. God is light and God exposes darkness. When we turn on the light, we see what's there. We don't necessarily like what we see. We don't always want to know the truth about ourselves. Some of us go to the doctor knowing in advance that we are not going to like what we hear, but we go because we need to hear the truth.

In one of our trips to Kenya, we did a touristy thing and visited the Masai Mara. This is what many of us picture when we think of Africa – wide open spaces with lions, elephants, hyenas, and rhinoceros. And it was everything we had hoped it would be. It was incredible. One day our guide took us to a Masai village. Of everything that I experienced in Kenya, this experience took me outside my comfort zone. The Masai are a semi-nomadic tribe that raises cattle. Their homes are constructed in a circle so that cattle can be brought into the middle at night for protection from the wild animals. Two things we experienced immediately – the smell and the flies. We were immediately covered with flies – something the people who lived there seemed to just accept. Their homes are made from sticks, dung mixed with urine. We were welcomed into this home. Five feet high, about ten feet deep by sixteen feet wide – the only light came from this door and one hole about the size of my fist through which the smoke from the fire could exit. Within this space, the family cooks, eats, sleeps, socializes, stores food and even keeps small livestock. I could hardly believe what I was experiencing. When we approached the village, I thought we would see people in costumes who were brought to this location by a bus – like a living museum – the sort of thing you might see at Fort Snelling. But this was real, and I could not shake off what I experienced because it was like a light was suddenly shining on my life, and I realized I would be embarrassed to describe how I live. I don't think they would even

understand how I could be living the way I live. And when I came home, I could no longer live the way we were living. We had to simplify. We focused on becoming debt free so we could give more away. We embraced the motto: live simply so others can simply live. It's why we keep returning to Kenya and why we are passionate supporters of Imara International. When the light comes into your life, you see things you did not see before. God will not force change on us. God does not destroy the dark but exposes the darkness in us – shines a light on what's wrong so we can be healed. And shines a light on the darkness that exists in this world. It's a way that God has of breaking our hearts for those things that break God's heart.

On the day of Pentecost, when the disciples received the gift of the Holy Spirit, it was not ultimately for them but for the world. **There were pious Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. When they heard this sound, a crowd gathered. They were mystified because everyone heard them speaking in their native languages. They were surprised and amazed, saying, "Look, aren't all the people who are speaking Galileans, every one of them? How then can each of us hear them speaking in our native language?** The Holy Spirit took uneducated Galileans who knew no other language and made them on for the world. They were able to do what on their own they could not do. God wants to be at work in us so that through us God can restore a broken world.

And that brings me to Imara International. Just the fact that Imara International exists is a work of the Holy Spirit. If you are not familiar with Imara, it is a mission in Nanyuki Kenya that provides a home for teenaged mothers and their children. Carol Erickson is our missionary that we send to Kenya in 2012 to start Imara International. She is with us today. There are a couple of things that happened in the past year. First, the impact of covid 19 on teenaged girls in Kenya. **[Carol will speak]** The second, is the vision that Imara International has had to create a village. Could you describe that for us? **[Carol speaks]** At a time when the need for someone to lead the way and respond to a crisis, Imara is positioned to provide hope. Here's where you come into the picture. We ended 2020 with an unexpected financial surplus – in part because our expenses were reduced due to the shutdown – but also because you were incredibly generous. And so, I asked our Servant Steering Team to give away \$100,000 and they said, we can't give away \$100,000 but we let's give away \$150,000. And the first \$50,000, we are giving to Imara International to fund a Director of Development to help Imara fulfill the dream and respond to this ever-increasing need. **[Carol thanks Messiah]**

And this, my friends, is a beautiful Mother's Day photo.

To understand the work of the Holy Spirit, it's like these grapes. Like these grapes, we are beautiful on the outside, but when we allow the Holy Spirit to work within us, we end up like this (grape juice). And so it is when we allow our hearts to be broken for those things that break the heart of God. And I want that for us all.

Grow, Pray, Study for the Week of May 9, 2020

Weekly Prayer: Come, O Spirit of God and make your dwelling place and home within me. Let the darkness around me be dispelled by your light, and my troubles calmed by your peace; let all evils be redeemed by your love, all pain transformed through the power of your Holy Spirit. Come, Breath of God and renew your life in me. Amen.

Monday, May 10

Scripture: Acts 2:1-11

When Pentecost Day arrived, they were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound from heaven like the howling of a fierce wind filled the entire house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be individual flames of fire alighting on each one of them. They were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages as the Spirit enabled them to speak. There were pious Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. When they heard this sound, a crowd gathered. They were mystified because everyone heard them speaking in their native languages. They were surprised and amazed, saying, "Look, aren't all the people who are speaking Galileans, every one of them? How then can each of us hear them speaking in our native language? Parthians, Medes, and Elamites; as well as residents of Mesopotamia, Judea, and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the regions of Libya bordering Cyrene; and visitors from Rome (both Jews and converts to Judaism), Cretans and Arabs—we hear them declaring the mighty works of God in our own languages!"

Observation: This week in part 2 of the *Spirit Powered* message series, Acts 2:1-11 reveals how the Holy Spirit connects us in both an intimate and authentic way in community with others, God, and the world. Repentance (last week, we heard how the Greek word for baptism means to be buried – we bury our wants, will and priorities) is your commitment to God. The gift of the Holy Spirit is God's commitment to you.

Application: This communion with God brings power to living and unity to all who live in God's presence. Where there is disunity, the Spirit is absent – or at least, we are not allowing the Spirit to work through us. Unity is one of many signs that the Holy Spirit resides within you. How do you know the Holy Spirit is present in your life right now? Are there visible signs? Name at least one way the Spirit has drawn you to be in community with others.

Prayer: Spirit of the Living God, fall afresh on me. Melt me, mold me, fill me, use me. Spirit of the Living God, fall afresh on me. Amen.

Tuesday, May 11

Scripture: Acts 2:1; 1 Corinthians 10:17

When Pentecost Day arrived, they were all together in one place.

Since there is one loaf of bread, we who are many are one body, because we all share the one loaf of bread.

Observation: God deliberately sent the Holy Spirit to the world when the body of Jesus followers were together, because the purposes of the Holy Spirit in the world are bigger than any individual. What the Holy Spirit does in you is not just your own private or personal matter. The Spirit in your life instantly connects you to all the saints and followers of Christ who have and will ever live.

Application: One reason to be connected to the body of Christ is that you are healthier, wiser, and stronger when you are connected with others than you will ever be by yourself. When you are confronted with a difficult task or decision do you normally seek wisdom from others or try to figure it out on your own? Which has been more helpful? Who or what group helps you be stronger in your life and faith?

Prayer: God, thank you for the ways you direct me to wise counsel and caring support from others. Help me to offer the same spirit of wisdom and compassion to others. Amen.

Wednesday, May 12

Scripture: Acts 2:2-4; John 14:17-18; John 16:8, 13-14

Suddenly a sound from heaven like the howling of a fierce wind filled the entire house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be individual flames of fire alighting on each one of them. They were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages as the Spirit enabled them to speak.

This Companion is the Spirit of Truth, whom the world can't receive because it neither sees him nor recognizes him. You know him, because he lives with you and will be with you. ¹"I won't leave you as orphans. I will come to you.

When he comes, he will show the world it was wrong about sin, righteousness, and judgment.

However, when the Spirit of Truth comes, he will guide you in all truth. He won't speak on his own, but will say whatever he hears and will proclaim to you what is to come. He will glorify me, because he will take what is mine and proclaim it to you.

Observation: Not only does the Holy Spirit make you one with the saints, but it also makes you one with God. Though never merely a private matter, God's interaction with you is distinctly unique and certainly intimate. The Spirit's presence does commune with your spirit and specifically brings conviction and guidance to your life as well as glorifies Jesus to you and the world.

Application: In John 16:8, Jesus describes the Holy Spirit as Advocate (some translations say "Companion"). Advocate is a legal term – one who convicts. How has the Holy Spirit worked in your life in convicting you of sin? The Holy Spirit also guides. How often do you seek guidance for your life? Where do you turn?

Prayer: Spirit of God, help me to hear from you what you see in me. Make me ever more self-aware. Help me to remove those tendencies that push you away and cause harm to others. Give me the wisdom and the courage to be the person you call me to be. Amen.

Thursday, May 13

Scripture: Acts 2:5-11; Ephesians 2:14-15

There were pious Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. When they heard this sound, a crowd gathered. They were mystified because everyone heard them speaking in their native languages. They were surprised and amazed, saying, "Look, aren't all the people who are speaking Galileans, every one of them? How then can each of us hear them speaking in our native language? Parthians, Medes, and Elamites; as well as residents of Mesopotamia, Judea, and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the regions of Libya bordering Cyrene; and visitors from Rome (both Jews and converts to Judaism), Cretans and Arabs—we hear them declaring the mighty works of God in our own languages!"

Christ is our peace. He made both Jews and Gentiles into one group. With his body, he broke down the barrier of hatred that divided us. He canceled the detailed rules of the Law so that he could create one new person out of the two groups, making peace.

Observation: Finally, the Holy Spirit brings about a restoration of the world, tearing down barriers that have kept people from God. Just as many people from different nations were present when the Spirit first came, you are to be a restoring force to the whole world, bringing God's love, grace, and redemption wherever you are and wherever God sends you.

Application: In Romans 8:14, Paul wrote this: "All who are led by God's Spirit are God's sons and daughters." In other words, God wants to be part of your life – close, as close as the air that you breathe. How close is God to you? Where do you think the Holy Spirit is guiding you? What steps will you take to walk in that direction?

Prayer: Loving God, hold me close. The stress and unexpected challenges of life pull me away from you, feeling I must do life all alone. Help me to breathe in your living and sustaining Spirit and know that you will not let go. Amen.

Friday, May 14

Scripture: Galatians 5:22-26

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against things like this. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the self with its passions and its desires. If we live by the Spirit, let's follow the Spirit. Let's not become arrogant, make each other angry, or be jealous of each other.

Observation: The Holy Spirit is invisible, essential, and powerful. Like the wind, we cannot see it but can see the effects. Here Paul describes the fruit, or the by-product of the Holy Spirit's activity in our lives. These virtues do not come because of obedience to commands or laws – only as the Spirit works within us.

Application: In what ways might these characteristics be understood as "fruit"? The fruit of the Spirit also shows a "family likeness." The world will know the body of Christ, the community of disciples, by their fruit. How would you measure your spiritual fruit?

Prayer: Spirit of God, I am discovering how you have been at work within me, enabling the fruit of your Spirit to grow and become a blessing to others. Thank you, God, for your amazing ways. Amen.

Saturday, May 15

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 12:1-31

Brothers and sisters, I don't want you to be ignorant about spiritual gifts. You know that when you were Gentiles you were often misled by false gods that can't even speak. So I want to make it clear to you that no one says, "Jesus is cursed!" when speaking by God's Spirit, and no one can say, "Jesus is Lord," except by the Holy Spirit. There are different spiritual gifts but the same Spirit; and there are different ministries and the same Lord; and there are different activities but the same God who produces all of them in everyone. A demonstration of the Spirit is given to each person for the common good. A word of wisdom is given by the Spirit to one person, a word of knowledge to another according to the same Spirit, faith to still another by the same Spirit, gifts of healing to another in the one Spirit, performance of miracles to another, prophecy to another, the ability to tell spirits apart to another, different kinds of tongues to another, and the interpretation of the tongues to another. All these things are produced by the one and same Spirit who gives what he wants to each person. Christ is just like the human

body—a body is a unit and has many parts; and all the parts of the body are one body, even though there are many. We were all baptized by one Spirit into one body, whether Jew or Greek, or slave or free, and we all were given one Spirit to drink. Certainly the body isn't one part but many. If the foot says, "I'm not part of the body because I'm not a hand," does that mean it's not part of the body? If the ear says, "I'm not part of the body because I'm not an eye," does that mean it's not part of the body? If the whole body were an eye, what would happen to the hearing? And if the whole body were an ear, what would happen to the sense of smell? But as it is, God has placed each one of the parts in the body just like he wanted. If all were one and the same body part, what would happen to the body? But as it is, there are many parts but one body. So the eye can't say to the hand, "I don't need you," or in turn, the head can't say to the feet, "I don't need you." Instead, the parts of the body that people think are the weakest are the most necessary. The parts of the body that we think are less honorable are the ones we honor the most. The private parts of our body that aren't presentable are the ones that are given the most dignity. The parts of our body that are presentable don't need this. But God has put the body together, giving greater honor to the part with less honor so that there won't be division in the body and so the parts might have mutual concern for each other. If one part suffers, all the parts suffer with it; if one part gets the glory, all the parts celebrate with it. You are the body of Christ and parts of each other. In the church, God has appointed first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healing, the ability to help others, leadership skills, different kinds of tongues. All aren't apostles, are they? All aren't prophets, are they? All aren't teachers, are they? All don't perform miracles, do they? All don't have gifts of healing, do they? All don't speak in different tongues, do they? All don't interpret, do they? Use your ambition to try to get the greater gifts. And I'm going to show you an even better way.

Observation: In today's reading Paul describes the gifts of the Holy Spirit. The presence of the Holy Spirit within us brings forth specific spiritual gifts in us. In verse 7 ("A demonstration of the Spirit is given to each person for the common good."), Paul tells us the purpose of these spiritual gifts. Have you thought about the gifts the Holy Spirit has given you?

Application: In verses 8-11, Paul lists the gifts potentially available to Christ's people. How might these gifts work together to benefit the entire church? At the end of this chapter, Paul points to an even better way in chapter 13. (If you can, also read chapter 13.) Paul suggests the highest motivation for the exercise of spiritual gifts is love.

Prayer: Come, O Spirit of God and make your dwelling place and home within me. Let my life be a reflection of your call to love. Come, Breath of God and renew your life in me. Amen.