



ST. MICHAEL'S SERMONS

Greenville, SC

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Acts 2:1-21

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"God's Own Breath"

Take a deep breath and blow it out again...feel that...that is the very gift of life itself!

That is God's own breath you breathe in and out.

In the beginning, God took the clay of the earth in His hands and shaped and formed it into a human being and then breathed His own life into it, He breathed His own life into us.

So the air we breathe is God's own breath, God's own life.

In Hebrew the word used to describe God's own breath is RUACH, which also means wind, air, courage and Spirit.

From the beginning God has given us His spirit, the Holy Spirit, to dwell in and among us, to bring us truth and life, and today, on the day of Pentecost, we celebrate that gift of wind and of courage, the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Now take another deep breath...breathe it out again...feel that!

For those of you who have studied or enjoy studying science, you probably know that the air we are breathing right now is the same ancient air of our ancestors, the same ancient air that the dinosaurs and the cave men breathed, the same air that has circulated through the jungles of Africa and the highest peaks of the Alps in Germany.

At this very moment we are breathing the same air that once was a baby's first breath, and a dying person's last breath. We breathe the same air as President Abraham Lincoln and the dear Martin Luther breathed.

It is that same air that keeps circulating throughout the atmosphere, throughout our world.

Have you ever stopped to watch a leaf dancing in the street, to see it suspended above the ground by the gentlest breeze? Or maybe you remember a cold, cold night when you stood huddled next to someone you love, breathing in and out, and watching your breath take the shape of a puffy, white cloud in front of your face.

I love to roll down all my car windows on a beautiful, warm, summer day and let the wind whip through my car, blowing my hair around, whistling in my ear. The wind is amazing really. It has a way of wrapping itself around you, or blowing past you, touching you in just a certain way. It's comforting and peaceful.

The sheer strength and power of the wind and yet its gentleness reminds me of just how small I am. It reminds me that I am caught up in something greater than myself, and someone greater than me is in control of this uncontrollable force we call the wind.

It reminds me that I am caught up in God's story, in the work of His hands, connected through time and space with all of God's creation.

Air...it is the gift of breath and life that we breathe in, use to live and then breathe out again. As we exhale, the breathe takes a little bit of us with it into the next person who uses it to live and breathe.

We are all connected through this gift of life, through the gift of God's own breath!

We are all called, named, claimed and connected through the gift of the Holy Spirit whom God has given us, through Jesus Christ, to be our teacher, our advocate, the truth and the peace that abides with us always.

Take another deep breath...breathe it out again...that is Christ's own breath, Christ's own life we breathe in and out!

Together, at this very moment, we breathe the air of Jesus' last breath on the cross, the breath he willingly let go for each of us, because he loved us so much; a breath full of passion and life, of service and sacrifice, of grace and forgiveness.

That final breath of our Savior did not vanish into air, but instead it grew. Jesus' final breath grew into a strong and mighty wind. A strong and mighty wind that God sent whirling through an upper room in Jerusalem, where Jesus' disciples and others were waiting.

It is that same strong and mighty wind that God sends whirling through this place today.

In today's reading from the book of Acts, we hear of the sheer power of the mighty wind that is the Holy Spirit, the spirit that knits us together as one body and one people.

"When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. 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."

Now imagine...there they were, the disciples and others, huddled in that upper room in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost. At least 100 of them gathered together, worried and sad, wondering what they would do without Jesus, scared and alone. Then suddenly from heaven came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were. There was no time to hide or run away.

Before they knew it the wind had struck sparks that burst into fiery flames above their heads, and they were filled up with the Spirit that blew through that place. A fiery tongue rested on each of them.

Now we hear that in the hands of God, Jesus' last breath had been transformed into the mighty power of the Holy Spirit and sent to stir the hearts, minds and tongues of those gathered in that upper room in Jerusalem.

Every one of them was filled with God's own breath!

And then something amazing happened! Not only did the Holy Spirit fill them up with God's own breath, when they spoke the air came out of them in languages they didn't even know they could speak.

"All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability."

People from all over the place who were gathered in Jerusalem for the festival of Pentecost were drawn to that house where they heard folks speaking their own language. They were amazed and astonished at what they heard and saw.

God's own breath had filled that place and transformed that frightened group of Christ's followers huddled in a room alone, into a bold group of evangelists!

Before that day was over, the Church had grown from a little over 100 hundred, to nearly 3,000 people. ***Now that's a membership drive.***

Just think, terrified people had become courageous, shy people had become bold and spoke out in other languages in front of people they didn't even know, and those who felt lost and abandoned had discovered a sense of meaning, purpose and direction.

Now take a deep breath and breathe it out again... Can you imagine yourself as part of that miraculous event? Can you picture yourself being moved by the Spirit in that way? Would you allow yourself to be vulnerable like that, open to the work of the Holy Spirit?

The mighty wind of God's own breath, the Holy Spirit, had filled those Disciples of Christ with strength and faith. Any doubt they may have had about their ability to continue in Christ's ministry had vanished and been replaced with the hope and the promise that even without the presence of their master they would be able to do and say as Christ had taught them.

Just as Christ did, they would be able to speak words of love and forgiveness, the words that draw people closer to God and to each other, the words that are not hindered by language or culture.

And the Good News is that it is in this very place where we gather together to worship God that the Holy Spirit still swoops in and out among us, knitting us together through the hymns we sing, the prayers we pray, the meal we share, the waters in which we are baptized and by the very breaths we breathe. This knitting together of God's people through the Spirit can happen with two people gathered together and it can happen with two thousand people.

Take a deep breath, let it fill your body, that is God's own breath!

I imagine for some of us the thought of a mighty wind blowing through this place, setting our heads on fire, moving us to speak in languages unknown, might be scary, it might make us think of sneaking out the back door before things get started. Wondering if we really want to be part of the evangelism committee...uh huh. I thought you might be thinking that!

Or for some of us the thought of God's own breath filling this place, filling our hearts, minds and bodies is comforting. It is for me anyway. The thought that it is the very breath of God that brings us from death to life, from doubt to faith, from fear to strength, from apathy to passion, from chaos to peace.

It is the gift of God's own breath around us, among us and in us that reminds us that we are not alone in this world, we are part of Christ's own body, filled with God's own breath and blessed by the power of the Holy Spirit.

This power, this strength, this peace that I'm talking about comes to the Church, comes to each one of us on Pentecost.

But do those of us gathered together today still believe in a God who sends mighty winds and fiery flames into our lives to strengthen and empower us. Do we believe our God is great enough to help us speak a language that all people can understand? Do we really believe it's possible?

My parents have adopted a kitten. She is a nice addition to the family but I must admit I wasn't exactly thrilled when I heard the news, considering I'm allergic to cats. And I don't think Rosie and Paco (my parents two chihuahua's) were thrilled either when the new little yellow and white puff ball arrived in *their* house.

So last week when I was home for graduation I decided to take my allergy medicine and play with that cute little kitten. I watched her peacefully roll around on the floor for at least an hour playing with her little bell and ribbon.

And then in the wink of an eye, from across the room, rushing towards the kitten came Paco, a stout but small little Chihuahua. Paco grabbed the kitten by the neck and trotted off towards the kitchen, as if she were his kitten. I laughed...what a site, a Chihuahua carrying a kitten in his mouth. That kitten squirmed and cried and gave him a fit. And then when Paco decided it was time he just dropped her on the floor and went on his way.

The kitten stood back up, shook herself straight and looked around as though a tornado had blown through there. That image of Paco picking up that unexpected kitten by the neck and carrying her across the room made me think of how the Spirit moves in our lives.

Even today, just as it did in that upper room in Jerusalem, the power of the Holy Spirit still grabs us by the scruff of the neck, shakes us around a bit, carries us where we might not want to go and reminds us that we are not in control. ***And that's a good thing!***

Because if we were in control we might choose to do things our own way and we know what a mess we can make of things sometimes.

As Christians we celebrate the day of Pentecost as the Church's birthday but Pentecost is not simply the church's birthday, it is the church's day of power. On that day, in that upper room in Jerusalem, God came to a frightened and discouraged community of believers, a group of people just like us, and delivered to them the power to live up to what Jesus said and did. God in Christ Jesus gave them His own life, His own breath, so that they may be strengthened to continue in Christ's ministry on earth.

God's power, the power of the mighty wind, the power of the Holy Spirit is now the church's power, your power, my power, our power.

God's power to liberate, to heal, to forgive, to love and to redeem was given to those gathered in that upper room and it is given to us today...so that together we may faithfully fulfill Christ's commandment to love one another, to go and make disciples of all nations, to be agents of liberation in our own world and time.

God has given us the gift of the Holy Spirit, just what we need to engage in the radical work of Christ Jesus. Pentecost and the power of the Holy Spirit empower us to live out our Baptismal call. To speak Christ's language of love that has no racial, ethnic or language border. Pentecost empowers us to bear with one another in our burdens, to feed and shelter our neighbor, to ***truly*** love one another and forgive one another, to live together in peace and harmony when we think it's not possible.

The Holy Spirit that blows through this place today and everyday calls us to truly be God's people in this place, it calls us to put aside our selfish ways, our stubbornness and our apathy, to quite complaining and turn aside from our anger and our pride.

The mighty wind that blew through that upper room in Jerusalem on Pentecost is blowing through this place at this very moment, calling you and me to say yes, to say yes to God's gift of grace and mercy to say yes to Christ's call to continue in His work in this world.

It is calling you and me to trust God's promise to with us always, knowing that no matter what it is we are called to do in His name, that He will strengthen, equip and empower us to do it. He will not abandon us, He will not leave us to bear our burdens alone. But in His name He sends the Holy Spirit, blowing through this place to be our peace, our comfort, our strength and our truth.

Take a deep breath...hold it there just for second...do you feel that, it's God own breath you breathe, God's own life.

May we together not rest until we have felt the Holy Spirit blow through our lives, rearranging things, opening things up and maybe setting our hearts and minds on fire. Let us pray every chance we get, "Come Holy Spirit. Blow through this place!"

Thanks be to God.
Amen.