

The Breath of God | *Keeping In Step with the Life-giving Spirit*

Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. (Galatians 5.25)

“Doubt and the Movement of the Spirit” (#1)

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^{John 7} Therefore Jesus said, "For a little while longer I am with you, then I go to Him who sent Me. ³⁴ "You will seek Me, and will not find Me; and where I am, you cannot come." ³⁵ The Jews then said to one another, "Where does this man intend to go that we will not find Him? He is not intending to go to the Dispersion among the Greeks, and teach the Greeks, is He? ³⁶ "What is this statement that He said, 'You will seek Me, and will not find Me; and where I am, you cannot come '?" ³⁷ Now on the last day, the great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink. ³⁸ "He who believes in Me, as the Scripture said, 'From his innermost being will flow rivers of living water.'" ³⁹ But this He spoke of the Spirit, whom those who believed in Him were to receive; for the Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.

^{John 20} So when it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and when the doors were shut where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in their midst and said to them, "Peace be with you." ²⁰ And when He had said this, He showed them both His hands and His side. The disciples then rejoiced when they saw the Lord. ²¹ So Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you; as the Father has sent Me, I also send you." ²² And when He had said this, He breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. ²³ "If you forgive the sins of any, their sins have been forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they have been retained." ²⁴ But Thomas, one of the twelve, called Didymus, was not with them when Jesus came. ²⁵ So the other disciples were saying to him, "We have seen the Lord!" But he said to them, "Unless I see in His hands the imprint of the nails, and put my finger into the place of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe." ²⁶ After eight days His disciples were again inside, and Thomas with them. Jesus came, the doors having been shut, and stood in their midst and said, "Peace be with you." ²⁷ Then He said to Thomas, "Reach here with your finger, and see My hands; and reach here your hand and put it into My side; and do not be unbelieving, but believing." ²⁸ Thomas answered and said to Him, "My Lord and my God!" ²⁹ Jesus said to him, "Because you have seen Me, have you believed? Blessed are they who did not see, and yet believed." ³⁰ Therefore many other signs Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; ³¹ but these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name.

Today begins a new series at St. Andrews... This IS, in OUR TRINITARIAN approach to the calendar, this is the season of the Spirit. We've just come from the season of the Son: Advent (Christmas) – Easter we look at the Four Gospels, the life and ministry of Jesus Christ... (“Food in the Gospels”).

In the Fall, the Season of the Father, looking at the work of God in the Old Testament...Genesis/Patriarchs.

And this season, the season of Pentecost, the season of the Spirit, the Breath of God and His life-giving activity in the Church and the world... *And here, we look at the New Testament, especially the Letters.*

When you think of the Trinity, for those of you who know God in this way...if you think of God in the way He's presented in the Bible (One God, eternally existing in THREE PERSONS – Father, Son and Holy Spirit) which of these three Persons is most real to you? Which Person comes most automatically to mind? Do you most easily THINK of God as Father, Son or Holy Spirit?... And probably...it's NOT the Third Person...and we can see why...

We've all known fathers and sons...and we can relate to those words and titles. But none of us knows a spirit; we may say we ARE Spirits and have bodies but we can't see our spirit...or anyone else's...*so it's harder to relate to a Person for whom there has been now reference point* (like there was for Father and Son).

Additionally... this is a Presbyterian Church...and the Spirit attends a Pentecostal Church (You know the old joke: the Pentecostals cry, "Fire! Fire!" ...the Baptists cry, "Water! Water!" and the Presbyterians cry, "Order! Order!").

Actually though, this branch of the Church has strongly emphasized the Person and the work of the Spirit...and every healthy branch of the Christian Church has exalted Him and welcomed His daily presence...and we neglect Him at our own peril.

So today...and for the coming season: St. Andrews, meet the Breath of God, the Life-giving Spirit.

Today, 1) Where WAS the Spirit? 2) Where IS the Spirit and 3) The Difference the Spirit Makes.

It's a strange text, especially when it's translated literally as in the old King James Version, John 7 v. 39:

"This He spake of the Spirit... for the Holy Ghost was not yet."... Our version adds words to make sense of the original language for English readers... "the Holy Spirit was not yet given..."

And the question is, "If He was not yet given...where was He? Did the Church in the Old Testament not have the Holy Spirit? What does this mysterious declaration MEAN?"

Well, He always WAS...In fact we meet Him on the opening page of the Bible. At the Creation of the world, the Holy Spirit was hovering over the waters and brings order out of chaos...He brings life out of death...He is the breath which, when breathed into that lump of clay, turns it into a living soul...Later, He blows like a breeze over the Valley of Dry Bones and they come alive...He is the Life-Giver ("*Lord and Giver of life*" – Nicene Creed). SO, "*the Spirit was not yet*" cannot mean that He hadn't begun to BE – He was at the beginning...is eternal as the Father and Son.

And when He makes human beings alive – living souls – He begins to work in all humanity...without any distinction...After man's Fall into sin, the Spirit works to save and reclaim them...Adam...Seth...Noah.

But then...there's a contraction: He isolates and calls out one man, Abraham and Sarah, and begins to focus on that one couple...*All His redemptive and His revealing activity centers on Abraham's people, on Israel the chosen nation.* If you want to come to God in that era, you have to come to Abraham's people. Everything moves to the center...to the Jewish people and the Land and the City of Jerusalem and the Temple and within the Temple to the Holy of Holies (that inner chamber accessible only to the High Priest) and within is the Arc of the Covenant and at its center...the Mercy Seat...the symbol of the presence of God...the Center of the Universe symbolized in that empty space.

And the Spirit comes on Israel but only intermittently ... He empowers people for great feats and then He withdraws. He comes on Gideon and on Deborah *and especially on the Prophets*...and then withdraws. "Salvation is from the Jews"; Jesus Christ will acknowledge that truth. Israel is the Vine that will fill the world with joy... Israel is the Water that will quench its thirst...the Light that will dispel the dark...the Temple where God will come down. *Israel is the focus and the Center of the Spirit's saving work. Israel is the answer.* The Spirit limits His saving, revealing, redemptive activity to this people.

And then...in time, the actual Presence of God Himself...not just the symbol...but God Himself appears in Israel...at the Center...in the Temple...in the empty space of a Virgin's womb...and that Baby is the densest concentration of the Spirit's work and presence on planet Earth. As the Spirit once hovered over the waters, NOW He hovers over this Person, Jesus Christ, in His Baptism. HE HAS THE SPIRIT WITHOUT MEASURE (John 3.34). The infinite Spirit who is God...is embodied in the Man, Jesus Christ and He has come to save! He is the Temple, the Light of the World, the Vine, the Water to quench our thirst...He is the perfect Israel condensed to a point. He is the Center of the Spirit's operations (Rom. 11.36).

And when He completes His saving work, when Jesus Christ has lived in my place – so that His obedience and beauty could be attributed to ME!... and when He has died IN MY PLACE...so that all my crimes are ascribed to HIM... *and He pays the penalty I deserved...* then all the Spirit's saving work begins to move OUT from Him.

The Spirit's work in redemption is contraction and expansion...first centripetal (contacting...moving toward a center...like a whirlpool or a vortex) and THEN centrifugal (expansion ...moving from a center...like a sprinkler)...If you can get this, it really helps you make sense on the entire Bible or at least begin to see it's general flow and direction ...

Jesus Christ stands in the Temple and says, "If anyone thirsts...for *purpose...for meaning...for truth ... for redemption and forgiveness* and for God... if anyone thirsts... let Him come to the Center... come to Me...and whoever believes in Me, from His own center will flow rivers of flowing water to bless the world...THIS HE SPOKE OF THE SPIRIT WHOM BELIEVERS IN HIM WERE TO RECEIVE...for the Spirit was not yet given because Jesus was not yet glorified."

And that brings up the second text... This was AFTER Jesus was glorified... AFTER His work on the Cross and AFTER He was vindicated by the resurrection... Then He comes, the Center, the One in whom the saving Spirit is concentrated *and He blows out the Holy Spirit on the Apostles*. Like the Spirit blew into the first human...now, He's breathing life into a new race, a new Israel, a new creation. The first creation is over...this is the eighth day...the new creation.

The Spirit came intermittently, sporadically but now He's given not like a trickle *but like a torrent* (Ezek.47)...like flowing rivers...OUTWARD! Like a sprinkler...He comes from Jesus Christ, to the Apostles and they are given power to forgive, power to bring the Good News into all the world.

Where IS the Spirit? If we say He's in the Pentecostal Church or some other group but not in our church, well that's a big, BIG problem!

I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws... I will put my Spirit in you and you will live... (Ezek. 36, 37)

See, He, the Spirit is *the animating presence of the Spiritual Life*. Without Him, we're just do-gooders... we're just religious or moral or afraid to get caught... It takes the presence of the

Spirit to “move” us to a real obedience that actually helps and refreshes people and brings glory to God. He’s a Person to be known and welcomed and to be experienced daily.

He communicates the benefits of Jesus Christ’s work into our normal routines...the Teacher, the Illuminator of truth (He opens our eyes to it and gives us faith to believe it) ...He’s the Guide and the One who assures us that we are Sons of God...He empowers/compels us to GO OUT...that’s His direction!

Is He that Presence in your life?...that Person? Well, how can you tell? Here’s a few signs of His presence:

1. He deals with our doubt. In this last passage, Jesus deals with the doubt of Thomas. He finds the whole group in doubt (They’re not *expecting* the resurrection – this is not wish-fulfillment). They’re all doubtful and Jesus has to keep coming with words of “Peace...Peace...Peace...” because they’re all afraid and doubting. But He deals with them and with Thomas (He really GIVES them something to TELL the world) but He also pronounces a blessing for future believers who DON’T see the evidence but are nonetheless believing because they are inwardly convinced by the Spirit!

It’s not that the Spirit convinces people without evidence...not like a kind of hypnosis or a psychological self-delusion... There’s still the prophecies fulfilled and the empty tomb and the Apostle’s testimony and *the things written* and it all makes sense... BUT *it’s more than just logic and agreement...IT’S FAITH*. And we need the Spirit to give us this sense of rest and receiving and to sustain our faith in the face of doubt.

Second, the man or woman who is not simply moral or religious or “spiritual” but actually endowed with or inhabited by the Spirit ...that believer will to one degree or another be a refreshing person AND see herself as on a mission...i.e. moving with the Spirit.

I’m not saying all believers have to be gregarious or that the Spirit makes you personality-plus... There are a variety of gifts and dispositions... but the person of the Spirit is described here as having refreshment gush OUT of him. We are meant to be both refreshed AND refreshING! The Spirit is on the move, His direction is *OUT* and there’s something IN the Spirit-filled person that resonates with that.

The Jewish leaders, in the first text, were OUT of step with the mission of the Spirit. When they suspected that Jesus Christ might go among the Greek-speaking Jews (who were...still

Jewish...but definitely “from the other side of the tracks”) – they were scandalized by that! “Where does this Man intend to go?”

Well the answer to that question is...He intends to go EVERYWHERE...OUT among the Hebrew Jews and the Greek-Jews...and the Samaritans...and Ethiopians *and the outright Pagan Gentiles...* BECAUSE the Spirit’s desire is to bring the whole world to acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord... And that sense of mission goes wherever the Spirit goes.

The world is parched. The world needs truth and life and purpose and streams of flowing grace...And the Spirit wants to use believers as His agents to refresh the world and tell the world about forgiveness of sins and about Jesus Christ the Son of God so that people can believe and have life in His name.

Lastly, and this isn’t necessarily in the text... but maybe as we launch into this series...and move toward the celebration of Pentecost (May 19th) and beyond maybe this could be a season of anticipation at St. Andrews. Maybe some would say, “Truth is... I’m not sure I am indwelt by this Person (the Holy Spirit) *who communicates the life of God and the power to obey with joy...* I’m open to say, ‘I want more!’”

Imagine a life in which you become acquainted with this INFINITELY fascinating Person, the Breath of God, the Life-giving Spirit. We can pray for that in these coming weeks...that the fresh winds of the Spirit sweep over this congregation...starting with YOU!

Jesus Christ is the one who gives the Spirit without measure (John 3.34)...SO (as this closing song says) let’s turn our eyes upon Him and simply trust Him... to fill us and make us more attuned to the things of the Spirit so we can be more used *to bless the world and glorify God.*