



Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Pastor Vince Gerhardy once told this story:

A little girl asked her grandfather, “Did you and grandma ever get into any fights?”

To which grandfather replied: “We don’t talk about it very often, but there was a time when we were not getting along very well. We seemed to be picking on each a lot and finding all kinds of things to argue about and really getting on one another’s nerves. Well, one day I came in from the garden and I heard a voice upstairs. I went to the stairs and heard your grandmother telling God what she could not bring herself to tell me.”

“Well, what did you do?” asked the granddaughter.

“I quietly walked up the stairs,” he replied, “and knelt down beside her and told God my side of the story. And from that day to this, we have never had a problem which we couldn’t resolve by talking it over with each other and with God.”

Do you think the Holy Spirit was active in that couples’ marriage? There can be no doubt. Conflict will always remain part of every relationship. The fruits of the Spirit – love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, humility, and self-control – will always remain critical for happy relationships with others.

The challenge is always before us as Paul said to the Ephesians, Be “eager to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Ephesians 4:3). When we fail, and be sure, we will do that often, the Spirit is quick to point us back to the cross and remind us of what Jesus has done for us. He points us to the love and the sacrifice that Jesus showed for each of us and the forgiveness and newness that is ours. Through the Holy Spirit we are encouraged and reminded that God loves us and consequently urges us to show love to one another.

But what or who is this Holy Spirit? Yes, we do know that the Spirit is one face of our Triune God. Try explaining that to Sunday school or confirmation students. And sometimes I think we as Lutherans are not good at talking about the Holy Spirit. It is a very difficult concept, one like no other, to grasp. So, let's give it a try this morning.

The Holy Spirit has long been associated with wind and breath. The Hebrew and Greek words for Spirit are actually Ruach and pneuma. You can almost hear the wind out of my mouth when I say the word Ruach. And Pneuma is where we get our English word pneumonia from, which obviously has to do with breath. In Genesis Chapter 1 we have our first exposure to this wind. Verse 2 says, "the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters." In Eugene Peterson's paraphrase called the Message, he writes, "Earth was a soup of nothingness, a bottomless emptiness, an inky blackness. God's Spirit brooded like a bird above the watery abyss."

Only a chapter later in Genesis we have God breathing life into Adam. "He breathed into his nostrils the breath of life." verse 2:7 And we all know that breath defines life. Babies take that first big gulp of air when they are born which is noted by their first cry. And we keep on breathing until we exhale our final breath.

In fact, every day, we breath about 20,000 times. By the time we are 65 we have taken 474 million breaths. Yet it is not something we think about. Other than me talking about breathing, you would not even give thought sitting here as to how often you breath. It happens all on its own, just like our heart beats without our being aware of every beat.

Today we are celebrating the day of Pentecost. You see the red paraments on the altar, pulpit, and me. It is the day that the Holy Spirit of God breathed on the community of followers of Jesus. This fulfilled the promise of Jesus that they would not be alone. He would provide an advocate, a Holy Advocate, a helper for them. As His followers gathered inside a house, the Spirit came. It filled the house with the sound of a mighty wind. Not a gentle breeze but rather a violent wind. This wind breathes a holy life into the disciples and three things occur.

The wind prompts them to go out into public. They follow the lead of the Spirit and go out and speak varied languages. Yet, through all languages are saying the same thing. They all tell of the victory of Jesus over death. These languages are a preview of what is to come, that the message of Jesus' love will spread to the whole world, no matter what language is spoken. His love is universal.

Let's circle back to breathing for a minute. Usually, we are unaware of our breathing. It is an unconsented happening. And sometimes I think that is just how our relationship is with the Holy Spirit. We are not always aware of His working in and around us. Thus, the Holy Spirit is sometimes known as "the shy member of the Trinity". He works quietly and inconspicuously. Can we imagine the Spirit running a race as our companion or as the still small voice sitting on our shoulder urging us to do or not do something.

The Holy Spirit also gather us together while He enlightens and equips us through the gifts. These are the gifts He brings that we heard about in our Corinthians reading: wisdom, knowledge, faith, healing, prophecy, discernment of spirits, and speaking in tongues.

It is true that there are times in life when we are still, when we sit down and rest that we can hear our breathing. In that same way, when it is quiet, we too can hear, see, and feel the Holy Spirit around us. Maybe when we take those few minutes to quiet our hearts for worship, I should say, let us breath in the Holy Spirit. Such centering on God or slowing our breathing is a tried-and-true part of meditation. The anxious pace of life is slowed, and we can be more in tune with the Holy Spirit. And what a wonderful posture for prayer as well. Come Holy Spirit. Come and take me away from the hectic day or relax my fear. Yes, just like the old Calgon commercial. Calgon, take me away!

The irony here is that the one time we become more aware of our breathing is when we realize that we are not breathing. Like a child with asthma who is scared because he cannot catch his breath. This happens to us when we are not connected to God in a meaningful way. We get so wrapped up in our earthly stuff that it takes over our whole being. There is then no room for God. And so just like the little child who cannot breathe without his inhaler, so it is with us when we cannot breathe in the Holy Spirit. The inhaler for us to take time in the Spirit, to read God's word, to pray, and to focus on God's love for us. The Holy Spirit enlightens us to remember to take time for God.

As I was thinking about the Spirit as a wind, it brought to mind that wind can be oh so destructive. We see it all too frequently on the evening news. Tornados, high winds, and hurricanes come with insurmountable damage to property and even life. Yet anyone who sails knows that you cannot get anywhere without the wind. The Holy Spirit of God continues to push and move us into new pathways, new ways of interfacing with the world. This breath of God moves us to ventures as yet uncharted. The Spirit breathes on us as He chooses. It directs us into arenas we could never anticipate. How exciting! Our new Sleep in Heavenly Peace ministry is just one observance of the Spirit moving among us. It pushes us to unforeseen ventures. This ministry will enliven and invigorate our faith.

And that folks is the third face of God, the Holy Spirit, who walks with us and brings us closer to God, our Heavenly Father. Not only does the Spirit make way for us to repair relationships like with grandma and grandpa, but it opens us up to ever new things before us that are full of grace and life. So, Come Holy Spirit, Come. **AMEN**