

FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

East Moline, Illinois

Pastor Becky Sherwood

May 5, 2024, The 6th Sunday of Easter

Genesis 1:1-2; Psalm 104:24a, 30-31; Ezekiel 37:7-10

Sermon Series: Come Holy Spirit: The Breath of God

"The Holy Spirit is the daily felt experiential presence of God, who will never leave me or forsake me." (Lectio 365 App, 4-2-24)

In the last church I served, the manse was not only next door to the church, but next door to a family with five daughters. One day I was coming home from a walk and I could hear four-year old Savannah calling my name when I was still several blocks away from our houses. She was on her front porch jumping up and down calling my name. As I got closer, I could hear her words: "Becky, come here, come here, come here! I have something to tell you!" I finally made it into her front yard. Bouncing up and down holding onto her porch railing she told me her incredible news: "Becky, the Holy Spirit lives inside my heart!" she shouted with joy, placing her little hand over her heart. "The Holy Spirit lives inside my heart!" There is nothing better than a four-year-old evangelist!

Today we are starting a May sermon series on the Holy Spirit of God, who lives in our hearts, as we prepare for Pentecost Sunday on May 19th and Trinity Sunday on the 26th. It is my prayer that you, like Savannah will come to share the joyous Good News that the Holy Spirit of God lives in your heart.

Each year in confirmation classes I tell our youth the story of Savannah.

Usually, the youth say that they don't know much about the Holy Spirit, I reassure them, that if they asked the adults of the church to help them understand the Holy Spirit the adults might stumble a bit too.

My prayer is that in these next weeks we can come closer to each you jumping up and down on your front porches like Savannah with the incredibly good news that the Holy Spirit of God lives in your hearts too!

There is a phone app I've listened to for years called Lectio 365 that I highly recommend. I listen to it each morning. Since Easter it has been doing a long series on the Holy Spirit. It will continue through Pentecost. You could download the app today and still have plenty to listen too, and you can even go back and listen from the beginning. The more I listened to it the more I felt convicted that we too should spend some time learning more about the Holy Spirit.

Because churches, including ours, often only spend time talking about the Holy Spirit on Pentecost Sunday, 50 days after Easter, and then on Trinity Sunday, the Sunday after Pentecost Sunday, I think its easy to make the mistake of thinking that the Holy Spirit of God only shows up in the New Testament.

Today I want us to look at a few of the many places that we can see the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament. We begin right in the very first words of the Bible. *"In the beginning, when God began to create the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void (or the earth was complete chaos), and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God (or the Spirit of God) swept over the face of the waters. (Genesis 1:1-2)*

There, over the chaos of the universe's early beginnings, the Holy Spirit of God breathed and moved with the creativity of our God. Before the beginnings of human time, the Holy Spirit was present bringing calm into the chaos.

Let yourself hear this beautiful poetry, not as science or history to be pinpointed into time, but as the beautiful poetic pictures we've been given.

See the darkness, the chaos, the formless void, the crashing waters, with the wind-filled Spirit of God breathing over the face of the waters, and God spoke into the watery chaos and said "Let there be light, and there was light, and God saw that the light was good!

Powerful creativity, breathing God's life over the chaos.

Then as Suzanne read in Psalm 104 God's Spirit breathed life into the creatures and creation. Or in Genesis 2 we see God breathing the breath and Spirit of life into Adam and Eve. The breath, the wind, the Spirit of God moving and breathing throughout creation and into their lives and our lives. The Holy Spirit, there from before the beginning of time moving and breathing, living in God's people bringing life to their hearts.

Then in Ezekiel we have the powerful story and vision of life that brought such comfort to the people of Israel when they were in exile, far from home. It is a vision that has brought comfort to generations since, to those who need healing for the dried-out places in their lives where it felt like all was death. In this wonderful story God gave Ezekiel a vision of a valley filled with human bones and they were all dried out. They'd been there a long time. God told Ezekiel to prophesy to the bones and tell them to hear the words of the Lord God. I'll be reading our final Old Testament reading from Ezekiel 37: 5-10, found on page 806 of the Old Testament if you'd like to follow along. Listen for the Word of God, and let yourself see this story as its read:

5 Thus says the Lord God to these bones: I will cause breath (or wind or Spirit) to enter you, and you shall live. 6 I will lay sinews on you and will cause flesh to come upon you and cover you with skin and put breath (or wind or Spirit) in you, and you shall live, and you shall know that I am the Lord." 7 So, [Ezekiel writes] I prophesied as I had been commanded, and as I prophesied, suddenly there was a noise, a rattling, and the bones came together, bone to its bone. 8 I looked, and there were sinews on them, and flesh had come upon them, and skin had covered them, but there was no breath in them. 9 Then God said to me, "Prophesy to the breath, prophesy, mortal, and say to the breath: Thus says the Lord God: Come from the four winds, O breath, (~~O wind~~, o Spirit) and breathe upon these slain, that they may live." 10 I prophesied as God commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived and stood on their feet, a vast multitude.

One: The Word of the Lord

ALL: THANKS BE TO GOD

This story is amazing good news for you and for me! The Holy Spirit of God breathes into our lives, hovering over the complete chaos and into the shadowed places. There is **no** place where God's Spirit cannot go.

Into places where new life is brewing, God's Spirit blows and breathes into our hearts and lives.

Into the dusty dry valleys where we can no longer imagine life ever moving again,

the Spirit of God can unite bone to bone

and cover it with muscle and skin

and breathe new life there,

and parts of our lives that we thought were dead can live, stand on their feet and begin again.

The breath of God's Holy Spirit brings life
 and change
 and joy
 and healing
 and the surprising good news
 that God can accomplish abundantly far more than we could ever ask or imagine, as is promised in
 Ephesians 3 (3:20-21).

My friend Jenn in Michigan helps her children and grandchildren practice this truth about the living presence of the Holy Spirit, and I want to teach this practice to you this morning. Begin by thinking about your own places of chaos, or valleys of dry bones, or things that worry or concern you or bring you sorrow. It can be big things or small things in your life where the anxiety that makes your shoulders rise up to your ear lobes. Now what you are going to do is, I'm going to invite you to: Take a deep breath and breathe out the anxiety, or the sorrow, or the pain, releasing it to God who can carry it far better than you can, and then to breathe in the peaceful, life-giving love of the Holy Spirit of God into your heart.

Will you do this with me for several breaths?

First take a deep breath and, breathe out the anxiety, or sorrow or pain, releasing it to God,
 And breathe in the peaceful, life-giving love of the Holy Spirit. And sit with that feeling for a moment.

Again:

Take a deep breath and breathe out the anxiety, or sorrow or pain, releasing it to God,
 Breathe in the peaceful, life-giving love of the Spirit who is God. And sit with that feeling for a moment.

Once more:

Take a deep breath and breathe out the anxiety, or sorrow or pain, releasing it to God,
 Breathe in the peaceful, life-giving love of the Holy Spirit. And sit with that feeling.

This is something you can do at home, in your car, before falling asleep at night.
 Because the Holy Spirit who is God lives in your heart.

God has breathed into our hearts and lives to
 give us life,
 to calm the chaos,
 to bring pulsing life where there has been dry death.

Trusting in the Holy Spirit, who has been with us from before there was time,
 who always breathes in your life and mine, who lives in our hearts, let us pray...