

Sunday Sermon
June 4, 2017
“Take a Breath”
Acts 2:1-11

Introduction

Into that room of discouraged, disheartened apostles there came, Luke says in Acts, the rush of a mighty wind and fire with power greater than anything they could have imagined, Holy Spirit.

I.

Why is it, do you suppose, that we Presbyterians do not talk as much about Holy Spirit? Is it that Spirit talk makes us nervous?

Do you know that the Hebrew word for spirit is the same word used in Hebrew for breath and wind? So suppose we were to use wind and its velocity as a measure of spirituality. Pentecostals would be over on one side as swirling hurricanes, and Presbyterians would be over on the other side as nice, gentle breezes, right?

Barbara Brown Taylor is an Episcopal priest, which means she is with us in the gentle breezes group. Taylor points out the word “conspire” means literally “to breathe together,” the “con” meaning “together,” the “spire” bringing in spirit and breath. So you could say to conspire means to breathe together in the same spirit.

So take a breath. Now blow it out. We have together just launched a conspiracy. That is what we do when we gather to worship or do mission and ministry. We breathe together in the same Spirit, and that Spirit moves among us, moves within us, and does amazing, you might even say Pentecostal, things.

Now take another breath, and blow it out. If you have studied earth or environmental science, then you know that our little planet is wrapped in a protective veil we call the atmosphere, which separates the air we breathe from the vast vacuum of outer space.

Beneath this veil is all the air that ever was. The same ancient air just keeps recirculating on earth. That means we breathe the same air breathed by Creator God in the beginning, the same air breathed by those apostles in Jerusalem the day Holy Spirit descended on them as a mighty wind.

II. Hurricanes Get More Press

And let’s face it, as nice as gentle breezes are, hurricanes get more press. People wake up and pay attention to hurricanes. Gentle breezes, on the other hand, can lull you to sleep.

That first Pentecost we just read about was a hurricane. When Jesus exhaled his last breath on the cross, that breath hovered for a while, full of love, full of life,

full of passion, growing in strength and volume, until God sent it as a category five wind upon those apostles.

Before they could board up the first window, that wind blew through, striking sparks that burst into flames above their heads. They were filled with God's very breath. And the air came out of them in languages they did not even know they knew.

They discovered abilities they did not know they had. They did things they had never seen anyone but Jesus do—all because they had dared to take a breath. They had conspired, breathed together God's own breath, and they were transformed.

III. How Are We Doing?

So how are we doing on Pentecost Day 2017? Are we blowing like a hurricane or a gentle breeze?

At times in his ministry, Jesus appears as a hurricane: performing miracles and mighty works, feeding thousands with five loaves of bread and two fish, healing the sick, walking on water, taking on the sins of the entire world on the cross, then defeating death through resurrection.

But look again, and you see times in his ministry that are more like a gentle breeze: building relationships with individuals, noticing those others did not see, feeling their hurts, understanding their yearnings.

It *is* true that most of the time our ministry here is more like a gentle breeze than a dramatic hurricane. Instead of with thousands, it happens more often a few individuals at a time. Instead of in one day, it happens over weeks, months, years even.

But the things that happen here are unmistakable signs of the Spirit's work. Breathing that same Spirit, enlivened by that same wind, we conspire and commission mission teams, Sunday school teachers, Bible Club and Camp leaders, shelter and soup kitchen workers, elders, deacons, worship leaders, PW leaders, community leaders and on and on.

Conclusion: Keep Breathing

So take a breath. Now just keep breathing. This is God's moment-by-moment gift to us. And if we keep breathing, the Spirit promises to fill us with new breath, set our heads on fire and give us tongues to speak of things we could not begin to imagine.

And we will realize that what we thought was a just gentle breeze has had the effect of a mighty hurricane. Keep breathing; let the Spirit of Pentecost be real in you and in this place. Amen.

Note: Material from Barbara Brown Taylor taken from "The Gospel of the Holy Spirit," in *Home by Another Way*, Cambridge: Cowley Publications: 1999, pp. 142-48.