

“Breaths of Life”

Rev. Ken McGarry at The First Church in Stoneham, Massachusetts

May 19, 2024 - Pentecost Sunday

[John 15:26-27; 16:4b-15; Acts 2:1-21](#)

Happy Pentecost! On this good day of celebration in the life of the church, we remember two baptisms. The first of these is what little Luke just experienced: Baptism with water, which has been since the beginning of the movement of Jesus-followers our rite of initiation into the family of faith. We welcome one another into our community's midst with this symbol as Jesus himself was baptized to signify his transition in identity and mission, from working as a craftsman in Nazareth to traveling throughout Galilee and Judea and ministering to people as a prophet, teacher, and healer. Since the time of Jesus, those who followed him were also baptized as he was into a new identity as members of his church. Whether we had water poured or sprinkled on us or were fully dunked, we were all baptized into this one faith with water, and, though diverse, we are united through this sacrament.

Today we celebrate Luke's baptism with water and we remember our own baptism or confirmation of it, but we also celebrate another shared baptism: Our baptism in the Holy Spirit. We heard a few moments ago in our scripture lesson from Acts about the inaugural act of the Spirit, meaning Wind or Breath, as this holy, fiery Wind came upon the first followers of Jesus when they had gathered together in Jerusalem about 50 days after the time of his death and resurrection for the festival of Pentecost, which was a spring harvest festival when many thousands of Jewish pilgrims from around the Roman world have journeyed to Jerusalem. As Jesus' followers gathered inside a house there, God's Wind rushed into where they were, and what appeared to be tongues of fire came upon each of them and enabled them all, as they breathed in God's Breath, to breathe out words in other tongues -- languages foreign to them, but understood by others who had journeyed from many other places to the festival. The disciples breathed out God's message about God's saving power, and all who heard it spoken in their own languages, were amazed.

On this Pentecost Sunday, we not only remember that first outpouring of God's empowering and unifying Spirit, but, wearing red, we celebrate the ongoing

action of God among us today, that God still comes among us and gives us the Breath we need to continue proclaiming God's message about God's saving power. We are still filled with the fiery Wind of God that gives us the breath we need to boldly proclaim God's truth and also empowers us to move in new directions to share messages of God's amazing, inclusive love with people in new ways.

Though we, the 2.4 billion people now living who are part of Christ's church, are a diverse people, we are united by this One Spirit that we share. Although we are of many nations and languages; though some of us are infants and others of us are elders; though many of us throughout time have been those who were bound by enslavement and many others of us have been those who were unbound by having all social advantages; though we are people of all abilities, people of all gender expressions, people of all political persuasions, and people of all theological convictions, we are one.

The broken and hurting people of our world need to hear anew our one message that God's unbound power saves us by empowering us all, diverse and united, to live in love. When we proclaim this message of good news by more fully embracing and sharing God's unifying love, we continue Christ's work of healing the hurting and binding the broken, setting ourselves and others free.

Today, dear Christian, breathe in deeply and fully take in God's Breath that you might breathe out divine words that give life, words that build rather than ruin, words that unite rather than divide, words that lift rather than lower. Let us all be committed to speaking in these ways and intentionally seek to avoid harming one another by participating in the destructive gossip factories and rumor mills in our midst. Let us speak in ways that encourage the building of common ground upon which we and those with whom we disagree may stand together, rather than using our words to bash other people until they submit to our will. May we be moved by today's reminders of our baptisms to more perfectly live into our identity as a united household of faith, called and empowered by God to speak and act in love as Jesus Christ spoke and acted in love.

Come, Holy Spirit, come! Dwell among us and in us, work through us, and set us all free. Amen.