

Sermon: "Everyone is But a Breath"

Breathe in...Breathe out. Inhale...exhale. Each time I preach of the Holy Spirit I begin this way. We breathe 12-14 times a minute without often thinking about it. At rest our lungs take in 6 liters of air per minute. When working hard, we take in more than 100. Our breathing is truly a miraculous process. Breathe in...breathe out. When we are aware, it can bring focus to our present moment. Today is not Pentecost Sunday, but The Holy Spirit often gets the least consideration of the Trinity. So much is geared to the hereafter. The Spirit is a gift for the here and now.

In the same way God created us with the capacity to sustain our lives, he has also given to us a way to breathe spiritually.

Soon, I will read today's feature scripture reading from John 16, but first let me set the stage a bit. You can't feel someone's breath unless you are in very close proximity. It could happen when a new mother cradles a new-born child. It could happen when you lean in to hear an ailing relative whisper something near their end time. It could happen after a peck on the cheek among friends or an intimate kiss between people.

To feel someone's breath is a very basic experience of intimacy; it gets grounded in our senses. We often forget the sheer physicality of breath. Now listen to the gospel account of Jesus breathing on his disciples in John 16, with all of that in mind.

"On the evening of that first day of the week, when the doors were locked where the disciples were., for fear of the religious leaders; Jesus came and stood

in their midst and said to them, "Peace be with you." When he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. The disciples were joyful, when they saw him. Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the father sent me, so now I send you. And when he said this, he breathed on them and said to them; "receive the Holy Spirit."

Think about how close the disciples must have been to Jesus to feel breath upon them. The considerable lesson we learn from this scripture is, our own experience with the Holy Spirit is dependent upon our nearness to Jesus.

How do you experience the Holy Spirit? The Holy Spirit is both our companion, our conscience, our counselor. The Spirit works with us just as we are. The Holy Spirit walks with us, even in our own strong-willed, faulty, independent life. To access it, we must first acknowledge our spiritual side. An unspiritual life cannot connect, cannot receive the gifts of the Spirit. Spirit can only be received by Spirit. When we are spiritually aware, we have access to what the Holy Spirit can do.

Here are some important characteristics to our life in the Spirit.

- Life in the spirit is relational; it is our human spirit in partnership with God's Holy Spirit.
- Life in the Spirit is rooted in God's love. The corollary of this is, if something you are experiencing is not rooted in God's love-it is not the work of the Holy Spirit.
- It is not simply philosophical it is experiential. It involves our thoughts, our senses, our imagination and our potentials.
- It is also experimental. We can try it out. Figuratively, we can take it out for a test drive and see how it works. Understand though...it can change you.

-It is conditional. Our life in the Spirit develops, evolves. Our capacity grows in relation to our trust in it. It can work the other way too. When the Spirit is left untended-it can diminish.

-It is immortal. The biblical image of the Holy Spirit as the breath of Christ is connected to our own incarnation. Our second scripture reading Psalm 39:6 quotes "Everyone is but a breath." Our lives here pass quickly. The Holy Spirit is the enabling force that transforms us from a mortal life to an immortal one.

Remember what was shared earlier...Spirit receives Spirit. Here, at the gates to new life, Spirit receives Spirit once again.

The Holy Spirit guides us, encourages us, inspires us, and on rare occasions it can direct us. All Christians have the Holy Spirit inside them, easily accessible. The fundamental question remains; how often do we give it the opportunity to do so?

The Holy Spirit is one more gift of a Christian church. We also retain the expectation, the hope, the miracle that is Christmas, the example that is Jesus, and the redemptive cross of Easter. Each time we sing "Spirit of the Living God, fall fresh on me," we are summoning the Holy spirit.

Breathe in...breathe out. Physical breathing provides the body with a constant supply of oxygen, which is necessary for energy production. Spiritual breathing is different than our autonomous breathing. In Hebrew and in Greek, the words for breath and spirit are the same. Yet Spiritual breathing is not autonomous, it is a conscious choice, a constant action. It is as easy to access as it is to say, "Come Holy Spirit, Come." Amen.