

God of Ages, I ask your help. In my discouragement, give me hope; in my confusion, give me guidance; and in times of frenzy and anxiety, give me your peace. Help me to trust that you order all things well and make me a channel of your healing and help to others. I ask this in Jesus' Name. **Amen.**<sup>1</sup>

The breath of life. Once again God breathes on humanity and life comes into existence. A reminder that all that we have and all that we are and all that we will be starts with the breath of God. An act of incredible intimacy. For those of you who have dogs, you may have had the experience of your dog, who loves you unconditionally, welcoming you home with a fiercely wagging tail and getting right into your face with licking you and sometimes even breathing on you. An act of love and trust and connection like no other.

Perhaps you are trained to give CPR. To bring back the breath of life to someone who has stopped breathing on their own. To hope for return of life in this intimate act of giving your breath to another.

The Holy Spirit is often said to be breath or wind or spirit- *ruach* in Hebrew or *pneuma* in the Greek. Thus, when we go to see a pulmonologist, we go to see someone who helps us with our breathing. Necessary to life- without breath we do not live.

We have two different accounts today of the breath of God being given to the disciples. In the Acts of the Apostles, it is the Day of Pentecost- the 50<sup>th</sup> day after Easter, after the Resurrection. The disciples are gathered as Jesus had told them to be, and "suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind" and "all of them were filled with the Holy Spirit" and began to speak in other languages as the Spirit gave them ability." Our reading from the Gospel of John happens on the evening of the Resurrection. Jesus appears to the disciples and says "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you. When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit.' A much more gentle infusion of the Spirit. Each of those present received the Holy Spirit whether they wanted it or not. Each of those present was gifted with God's presence, then and now and always.

What do we do with this Spirit? How does it inform our life? For us, our gifting of the Spirit comes with our baptism. "I baptize you in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit." We mark the baptized with chrism signifying the sealing of the baptized with the Holy Spirit – as Christ's own then and now and for ever. Paul reminds the Corinthians of this when he writes: "For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body – Jews or Greeks, slaves or free- and we were all made to drink of one Spirit." Eugene Peterson paraphrases it this way: "Each person is given something to do that shows who God is."<sup>2</sup>

Each of us receives gifts from the Holy Spirit to be used to be Christ's presence on earth. To bring the kingdom of God to earth as we say each week in the Lord's Prayer: Thy kingdom come, they will be done, on earth as is heaven. It is our call and our response to God to use our God-given gifts to help this place we live more fully reflect God. We do not work alone. Each one of us has gifts.

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<sup>1</sup> Society of St. John the Evangelist. May 31, 2017

<sup>2</sup> Eugene Peterson. The Message (NavPress Publishing Group, 2006) 1682.

The other day during Bible Study, I went around the group naming some of the gifts of each person there for which I am grateful. Ways in which each person contributes to our being St. John's and a vital witness to God. I offer this up to you as a way of remembering that though our gifts are different, each is necessary. From this one, I see examples of joy in teaching. In this one, I see talent in art. In this one, I see adversity overcome. In this one, I see a love of history that deepens our study by giving us some context for our discussions. From this one, I see daily examples of compassion. Every single one of us has gifts- not just one but many. It is up to us to decide how we will use those gifts. Solely for our own purposes or will we love God enough to open up our gifts for the benefit of the community?

Part of being able to use our gifts for the wider community may mean putting down our hurts and our disappointments. It's tempting sometimes when we've been hurt to take the attitude: "Well, I'll just take my toys and go home." And there we sit, lonely, angry, bitter – all because we refused to forgive the wrong – the sin- that we believe someone committed against us. Jesus gives us peace when he gives us the Holy Spirit. And he gives us an assignment: "If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them." And he notes that "if you retain the sins of any, they are retained." It isn't the one who has sinned that retains the sin- you retain them. They take up space in your head until you forgive the sin. You are the one mired in sin. Jesus wants us to forgive, to clear our brain so that we can fill that space with love of God and love of neighbor. Peterson asks us to consider "If you don't forgive the sins, what are you going to do with them?" What benefit is there to you for retaining sin? Give it up! Accept that we are human and others will do things that you don't like. It is up to you how you respond. No one else can make you happy- or make you sad. Only you can choose to be hurt emotionally by what someone else did that you didn't like. Jesus tells us to forgive 70 times 7. In other words, over and over and over again. Someone else having an opinion different than yours is no reason to carry around hurt and resentment and bitterness. Sometimes that other opinion can even be helpful in evaluating whether your own beliefs are valid if you will be open to difference and not see difference as threatening.

On the day of Pentecost those present heard languages from around the world but they stayed connected. They worked together, despite their differences, for the peace that had been bestowed upon them by the Holy Spirit. Despite claims that those who had received the Holy Spirit were drunk on wine, even though it was only 9 o'clock in the morning, what really had happened was that the Holy Spirit had infused them with opportunities, with hopes and dreams, and a desire to work for the kingdom of God. "For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body" to do the work that God has given us to do. Jesus sends us forth. We are on the move to spread the Gospel to the ends of the earth. Join me in going out these doors and living in the Spirit. **Amen.**