

Every year we share this story of Pentecost – when the Holy Spirit comes to Jesus' disciples. It is dramatic, noisy, and full of movement. For us, it has become the accounting of a wild spectacle, complete with spiritual fireworks. Pentecost is often seen as a dramatic, one-time miracle from long ago.

Ah, but dear Atonemates, Pentecost is much closer to us than that. As close as our own heartbeat. As close as the air we breathe.

And that is where it begins – with breath. Pentecost begins in something as ordinary and normal as breath.

In Acts, the Spirit rushes in like a violent wind filling the whole house. And in John's Gospel, Jesus comes into a room full of disciples and breathes on them. He breathes on them.

It is such a tender image. No flames. No roaring crowds. Just breath shared between people.

And I think that tells us something important about the Holy Spirit. Before the physical presence, Spirit is the center of a spectacle with fire and wind; the Spirit is companion to the disciples, though they may not yet know it.

And for us it is the same. Before we have words, there is breath. Before we know speech, we know how to breathe. Breathing is life at its most basic and universal level.

The moment we are born, we inhale. The moment life ends, we exhale for the last time. And everything in between is carried by our breath.

No wonder breath has become such a powerful biblical image for Spirit, life, and God's presence. Breath is invisible, but essential. We cannot hold it. We cannot control it for very long. We simply receive it.

It is the same with the gift of life. We receive...we share. We live by breathing the same air, sustaining one another in ways we barely even notice.

Then comes this extraordinary moment in Acts. People from all over the world hear the disciples speaking. Each person hears in their own language. Of all the amazing moments, this feels most important to me. The miracle is not that everybody suddenly becomes the same. The miracle is that everyone is addressed as themselves, known and accepted as who they are.

Some of us experience the Spirit through feeling, others through questions and understanding. Pentecost makes room for both. The Spirit does not erase difference. She speaks through it. People from every direction, culture, and experience are suddenly hearing good news in the language of their own hearts.

And that matters. It mattered then, and it matters now, especially now.

We live in a world that often seems determined to divide people into categories of them and us. We are sorted, labeled, and separated by politics, generation, race, identity, nationality, ideology, wealth, education, theology, and a hundred other things.

And yet Pentecost tells a different story. Pentecost says that beneath all our differences there still exists a deeper language. The language of compassion. The language of care. The language of grief. The language of hope. The language of all our humanness. All of these ways of expressing that we recognize as common long before we agree on everything else.

We do not need translation to understand someone holding your hand as you stand together in prayer. We do not need translation to understand tears. And we do not need translation to recognize kindness and welcome.

That is one of the great miracles of the Spirit. Not that we all become identical, but that we recognize each other.

And perhaps that is why the crowd reacts the way it does. Some are amazed. Some are confused. And some say, "These people are drunk."

Honestly, I love that part of the story. Because apparently, when people become too joyful, too hopeful, too alive, somebody always gets suspicious.

And there is no question, the disciples looked completely unrestrained. And they were! They looked freer than respectable religious people were expected to look. And they were! It's funny how genuine joy always looks a little strange and out of place in strained and exhausted times.

But, you see, the Spirit does not numb people. The Spirit wakes them up. Pentecost is about awakening. It is about becoming fully alive.

And John's Gospel makes that clear too. When Jesus breathes the Spirit onto the disciples, the first thing he says is, "Peace be with you."

Then he sends them into the world.

The Spirit is not given so the disciples can remain where they are. The Spirit moves them outward into deeper connection, deeper compassion, deeper purpose.

And that raises an important question for us.

What is holding your attention these days?

What is taking your breath away?

From where are you drawing inspiration?

Because we are all being formed by something. Beauty, mercy, wonder, love, community – even our frustration and anger. They are all gifts the Spirit offers for our taking... for nourishment, for motivation, for inspiration.

That Spirit, She just keeps drawing us toward fuller life.

I remember once taking one of those multiple-choice inventories to “uncover “my spiritual gifts. I was probably in my mid-30s. Honestly, it reminded me a little of those quizzes in Cosmopolitan magazine that we all loved taking in our 20s.

“What kind of person are you?”

“What hidden gifts do you have?”

And the inventory revealed some things that felt very true. That I am relational. I am open to new experiences. And I genuinely like people, and I want to please them.

And I remember thinking, “Well, yes... that sounds about right.”

But I also realize now that at the time I took that survey, I was not nearly as outgoing as I am now (if you can believe that). I was less confident in my own voice. Less certain about what I had to offer the world.

And now, years later, I realize something else. That inventory was measuring a moment in time. Yes, much of what it revealed was true. Some of it is still true. I remember Anne Lamott once saying something like **"I do not at all understand the mystery of grace—only that it meets us where we are but does not leave us where it found us."** Yes, thank God, the Spirit does not leave us where we are.

The nature of Pentecost is revelation, but it is also growth. The Spirit keeps unfolding us, keeps stretching us, and keeps calling forth gifts we did not even know we possessed: courage we did not know we had, compassion we had not yet learned, and the wisdom that only comes through living.

So, Pentecost is not simply discovering who we are. It is also discovering who we are still becoming together. And Pentecost reminds us that this life in the Spirit is never merely individual.

Archbishop Desmond Tutu once said, *“My humanity is bound up in yours, for we can only be human together.”*

Many languages, but one shared life. Many gifts, but one body. Many stories, but one Spirit breathing through all of them. Gifts given for the sake of one another. Gifts given so we can serve, so we can encourage, so we can heal – heal ourselves, each other, and the world.

The Spirit keeps drawing us back toward one another. Back toward compassion. Back toward the deep truth that nobody is meant to carry life alone.

The disciples leave Pentecost changed, not because they suddenly have all the answers, but because they have discovered a larger life together.

Breath. Wind. Spirit. *In-spiration*.

The Spirit is still moving as close to us as our next breath.

And She is still asking:

What is inspiring you now?

What is awakening you?

What is calling you toward deeper life?

And how will you use the gifts you have been freely given so that this weary and beautiful world can breathe again, too?

Amen.