

May 7, 2017
Sermon for Confirmation Sunday
St Peter Lutheran Church
Bowie, TX
Larry Knobloch, Pastor
Breathe on Me, Breath of God
Acts 2:42-47; John 20:21–22; Acts 2:2-4

J.J.- Jesu Juva—Help me, Jesus

Acts 2:42–47 (ESV)

The Fellowship of the Believers

⁴² And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. ⁴³ And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. ⁴⁴ And all who believed were together and had all things in common. ⁴⁵ And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. ⁴⁶ And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, ⁴⁷ praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.

John 20:21–22 (ESV)

²¹ Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you." ²² And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit.

Acts 2:2–4 (ESV)

² And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. ³ And divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them. ⁴ And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance.

Grace, Mercy, and Peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ!

What a great day! A great day for Cooper and Sarah who are making their confirmation of faith—a day for which you have studied, waited, and prayed.

A great day for your parents and family members—a day you have looked forward to for years. A great day for me too—a day anticipated and planned for through hours of instruction.

It's a great day for the entire congregation—a day to welcome these young members into fuller participation and responsibilities in this congregation.

A great day, most importantly of all, because this is a day when the Holy Spirit will breathe on you, Cooper and Sarah, as well as all of us here today.

The theme of our sermon is a prayer for that to happen: “Breathe on me, breath of God,” which is the first line of an old hymn Edwin Hatch wrote in 1878. This hymn made an appearance in the old blue hymnal but didn't make it into our new one, otherwise we might have sung it today. But listen and pray with me, as the first stanza prays (*LBW* 488:1):

Breathe on me, breath of God; Fill me with Life anew,

That I may love all that You love And do what You would do.

Think about it, in reality, it is God's breath gives us life.

Back in the beginning, Genesis 2:7, “*then the Lord God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature.*”

To this day, when I read nostrils in that verse, it makes me smile a little bit. We don't normally talk about nostrils, but that's what God did. He personally breathed His breath of life into our nostrils! God created us with what we would call a personal touch. He didn't just create a living animal like He did with everything else, He describes in detail, at least

as much as we have the ability to understand, how He formed man from the dust, that He had created a few days earlier, and then breathed His breath of life into us...into you!

There is a British film that told the story of a man from Calcutta who came to London to make his fortune. The first week there he saw a woman struck by a bus. She lay on the street, not breathing. The man from Calcutta rushed to her and applied mouth-to-mouth resuscitation. She was revived, and, pleased with his work, the little man said, "Madam, my life is now in you" (Robert H. Smith, *Proclamation 5*, Series A, Holy Week [Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992] 64).

My younger brother and I were discussing CPR and rescue breathing last Wednesday over lunch. He is a City of Austin paramedic/firefighter. I'm just a geek who finds those things interesting, but still, when we take in a breath the air that is inhaled is about 20-percent oxygen, and the air that is exhaled is about 15-percent oxygen, so we actually only use about 5-percent of the oxygen in each breath. So in CPR, we are actually sharing the oxygen that we bring in, our oxygen, with another who needs it.

When God breathes on us, His life comes into us. His breath gives life.

When God formed Adam out of dust from the earth, God breathed into his nostrils and the man became a living soul (Gen 2:7). Later on Ezekiel saw the vision of a valley of dry bones. God breathed and they came to life (Ezek 37:4–10).

Today we will use several texts about the breath of God, and how that breath gives life. One of the key passages is from the story of Easter (Jn 20:21–22). Though Jesus had risen from the dead, the disciples were still hiding in their locked room. Suddenly Jesus was standing there among them.

He said, "*Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you.*" And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "*Receive the Holy Spirit.*"

The Lord breathed on His disciples, and they received the Holy Spirit. That was the beginning; more spiritual power would follow.

Jesus told His disciples, *“I am sending you out to make disciples of all nations, but don’t go until you get the power the Holy Spirit will provide.”* On the day of Pentecost, 50 days later, He finished what He started on Easter night when He breathed His new life into them.

The account in Acts 2 says that while the disciples were all together, *“And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. And divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance.”* (Acts 2:2-4).

The Bible uses same word for wind, and Spirit in both the Greek of the NT (*pneuma*) and the Hebrew of the OT (*ruach*). In the imagery of the Bible, when God breathes, a wind comes out of his mouth, the wind of the Spirit that gives life.

When does God breathe on us and give His Spirit and life? Think of four particular times.

God breathes on me: in Baptism

Jesus told Nicodemus that the life we receive at our natural birth does not bring us into the kingdom of God. In order to become part of God’s kingdom—to have God’s life in us—we must be born again (Jn 3:3–5). And that happens when God connects His Spirit, His Breath, to water in Baptism.

Do you remember when that happened to you at your baptism? Most of us were baptized as infants so we don’t remember much about it except what our parents and sponsors have told us.

I don’t remember my baptism back in 1967, but I clearly remember the baptism of all of my children. Two at Immanuel in Giddings, one at Martin Luther in Giddings and one at Holy Cross in Fort Wayne, Indiana.

The Scriptures were read, we prayed and water was poured on their heads and the pastor said, “I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.”

God breathed; and our children were born again. Not the pastor, not us, but God!

Secondly, we confess Jesus.

After I am baptized, I continue to learn what happened at my Baptism and what it means for my life. I learn that I am a sinner and need forgiveness of sins. I learn that Jesus, God's only Son, died on the cross to pay for my sins.

God had planned for His Son to die. He sent him to pay for your sin and my sin by dying in our place, for the *"wages of sin is death."* When I say, I believe . . . I'm saying right along with the prophet Isaiah: *"Behold, God is my salvation; I will trust, and will not be afraid; for the Lord God is my strength and my song, and he has become my salvation."* Isaiah 12:2 (ESV)

God has breathed on me. St. Paul says, *"No one can say, 'Jesus is Lord,' except by the Holy Spirit"* (1 Cor 12:3). God breathes on us at our Baptism. Our confession of faith is the result of God's breath.

A third important time for God's breath is at confirmation.

When we are ready to make a public confession of the faith into which we were baptized, when we have been taught the faith, and when we are ready to promise to be faithful to our Lord, we are confirmed.

What does that really mean? There are different ways to describe confirmation, but I like to start with the dictionary definition which stresses the word firm in confirmation. To be confirmed means that something is made firm, made certain and sure.

How are you made firm at confirmation?

You confess your faith and make a promise. Does that do it? The pastor puts his hand on your head, speaks a blessing and reads a verse of Scripture.

Does the pastor make you firm? The congregation prays for you. Does that do it?

All of this is involved, but it is God who does the confirming.

Listen to these words from the confirmation liturgy: "Heavenly Father, we thank and praise You for Your great goodness in bringing these Your sons and daughters to the knowledge of

Your Son, our Savior, Jesus Christ, and enabling them both with the heart to believe and with their mouth confess His Saving name.”

God breathes on and in you and the Spirit, fills you with new life!

God doesn't force His breath on you. You can turn away when He breathes on you.

It's so easy to do. I remember when Pastor Kelm, at Our Redeemer in Houston dropped the fuzzy thing from his microphone back in 1985. It lay in front of the railing that we were kneeling at when I made my confirmation. My mind was on that little fuzzy thing as I answered the same questions that Cooper and Sarah will this morning.

Fortunately, God provides forgiveness for our “meaningless vows” as well as for broken vows. Thank God that His vow to us in Baptism and in His Word is never meaningless; because it is eternal. Through His Word, and in light of your Baptism, God is breathing His Spirit, His life, into you on this, your confirmation day, to strengthen you and help you keep your vow.

There is a fourth time that we think about God breathing on us. He gives us His life as we live out the Christian life.

Confirmation is not a final fix that takes care of us for the rest of life. That's what Renea Gernant thought. In a *Lutheran Witness* article (July 1986, p. 10) Renea tells how she fell away from church. “My Bible got dusty. Slowly I found that church and God were secondary. I became weaker and weaker in my witness.” As this gradually happened, her excuse was, “God knows I'm only human.” That's one way the devil tries to lead us astray. There are many others. Everybody is doing it. That's another way the devil gets at us. We find ourselves in a world where everyone else does what they want, so why shouldn't we?

The devil has his own ways to get at each of us individually: rationalizations, hard times, real temptations, rejection and ridicule for our faith. What can we do when this happens? We can pray, “Breathe on me, breath of God” and go to His Word and Sacraments, because through them God breathes His life into us again and again, no matter how many times we have

turn away from Him. Jesus is not physically present to breathe on us as He did in that room to his first disciples, but He still breathes on us in Baptism. He breathes on us through His Word, the holy Scriptures. He breathes on us as we receive His true body and blood in the Lord's Supper.

As you get ready today to make your confirmation, your confession of faith and speak your vow; as those of us who have been confirmed remember our own confirmation; and as all of us think about how God has breathed His life into us, know that Jesus will never leave you nor forsake you.

He called to you from the cross, He breathed His Holy Spirit upon you and called you His own from your Holy Baptism.

No matter how many times you have turned away, you can't out run the wind, the breath, the Spirit of God.

Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and mind through Christ Jesus!

Amen.

Soli Deo Gloria-To God alone be the Glory

Sermon Outline

Breathe on Me, Breath of God

John 20:21–22; Acts 2:2-4

- I. God's breath gives life.
- II. God breathes on me.
- III. The devil has his own ways.