

***Acts 2:1-4 When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. <sup>2</sup> Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. <sup>3</sup> They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. <sup>4</sup> All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.***

***Let everything that has breath praise the LORD.*** It is a simple reality: no breath, no life. While, short of some crucial moments, none of us needs to be told to breathe in and breathe out, we still need the Spirit's breath of life. Look at day six of God's creation: ***The LORD God formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being.*** (Gn 2:7) Breath means life. And that breath of life comes from the Father through the Holy Spirit as we confess in the Nicene Creed that he ***proceeds from the Father and the Son.*** Job put it this way: ***The Spirit of God has made me; the breath of the Almighty gives me life.*** (Job 33:4) In fact, later in the service, we'll sing to the *Living, life-imparting Spirit.*

But, it does beg the question: If I'm alive and singing to the Holy Spirit, why am I singing about bringing me life? I'm alive already, not so? Oh, you may be alive physically, but you see, this whole "*life-giving breath of the Spirit*" is more than just physical life. Thanks be to God, the Spirit breathes spiritual life and consequently, eternal life, into each of us. His breath has come upon us and filled us and dwelled within us, kindling in us the fire of Christ's love. In a spiritual sense, he is the very air we breathe each and every day of our lives of faith.

If you catch us early enough in the morning, you might just see the telltale signs: sleep marks around the head and down the cheeks. Only these aren't from a wrinkled pillow case. These lines are formed

by headgear from a CPAP or BiPAP machine. Anyone who struggles with sleep apnea knows what I'm talking about.

Sleep apnea, most commonly, is the obstruction of one's airway while sleeping, causing the individual to stop breathing, repeatedly. The brain then briefly arouses the individual from sleep to resume breathing, as much as 60-100 times an hour. This can cause all sorts of problems from loss of sleep to high blood pressure and, in severe cases, can even cause death.

The good news is that apnea, especially obstructed sleep apnea, is treatable. For me, the telltale sign of apnea wasn't so much the loud snoring, but the times I would wake up gasping for breath. It's to the point where I have slept only three nights without my machine in the last 15 years. But some people, even though they realize the benefits and risks, may still insist on sleeping without it and find themselves gasping for breath.

We spoke before of the life-giving breath of the Spirit. We have been brought to physical life with but a breath of the Holy Spirit. We have been brought to spiritual life with but a breath of the Holy Spirit. But even though we know the risks, we sometimes think that we can breathe without him. It's as if we think that the Spirit is nothing more than an occasional sleep aid that we might use now and again, but for the most part is purely optional.

This is precisely when the apnea of sin obstructs our spiritual breathing. What once were full breaths of the means of grace, now we find ourselves gasping for but a breath. Apathy stifles. Greed chokes. Fear strangles. Despair clogs. Arrogance jams. Sin suffocates! We gasp for breath even with the Holy Spirit's breath of life within our reach!

You can certainly see it in the disciples. Even after seeing the risen Christ and worshipping at his feet, Matthew tells us that "***some doubted.***" (Matthew 28:17) They were gasping for but a breath, with the risen Jesus standing before them, as the doubts and fears threatened to suffocate them.

But Jesus knew it all, didn't he? Listen to his reassurance in the gospel of

John: <sup>26</sup> ***But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.*** <sup>27</sup> ***Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.*** (John 14:26-27)

And there it is: Jesus' gift to spiritual lungs gasping for but a breath - the breath of the Spirit. It would take 53 days, but just as he has come to each of us, so the Spirit came to the disciples with the breath of life. ***When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. <sup>2</sup> Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting.***

It may be but a breath, but the Spirit has come to us and continues to come to us through the life-giving waters of baptism, through the life-empowering word of the gospel, and through the life-assuring body and blood of Christ Jesus. Through the message of the Christ crucified and risen from the dead, in word and sacrament the Spirit breathes into us and dwells within us just as the Father has promised. And it is this breath that feeds the fire of faith. We're told that the disciples ***saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. <sup>4</sup> All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.***

Any campfire builder will tell you that a flame will quickly die out if it is not fed by air. In fact, many a campfire builder will light a fire and blow on the flame to give it that extra little bit of oxygen. This is called fanning the flame. Paul talked of this with Timothy. ***I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands. <sup>7</sup> For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline.***

Today marks a turning point between the festival half of the church year and the non-festival half of the church year. Today we transition from an emphasis on Christ for us to Christ in us: the in-dwelling of his

Spirit kindling in us the fire of ***power, love and self-discipline.*** And so, in the weeks ahead during the season of Pentecost, we will be emblazoned, fired-up...

- ✦ to put our faith in our incomprehensible triune God
- ✦ to appreciate law and gospel / confession and absolution in our lives of faith
- ✦ to recognize the importance of producing fruits of faith
- ✦ to place our full trust in our loving Savior even when times are tough
- ✦ to live a life on fire for Jesus

Peter talked about it before that crowd of thousands. He connected the dots from the prophets, to the outpouring of the promised Counselor, to the proclamation of the gospel for the salvation of many lives. We, too, have known the Lord's promise (to Ezekiel): ***I will put my Spirit in you and you will live.*** We, too, have come to know the life-giving breath of the Spirit. We, too, have seen with eyes of faith the "***wonders***" (v. 19) of Christ. We, too, now live for him by the fire kindled in us with but a breath of his Holy Spirit.

*Come, oh, come, life-giving Spirit,  
God from all eternity!  
May your power never fail us;  
Dwell within us constantly.  
Then shall truth and life and light  
Banish all the gloom of night.*

Amen.