

Is it just me, or lately does it seem like the whole world's gasping for air? I mean, just this week, the streets of Minneapolis are flooded with peaceful protestors and riotous criminals alike. Together, they're chanting with one voice, "I can't breathe" . . . "I can't breathe" . . . "I can't breathe." The same haunting words that George Floyd desperately choked out as he struggled to catch his breath.

Then, throughout this pandemic, many have dutifully followed guidelines to wear a mask in public. But while such face coverings are to prevent the spread of contagion, many have reported fatigue and dizziness when they returned home. Deprived of fresh air, their lungs were forced to inhale their own stale carbon dioxide.

And just the other day I was talking to someone who was still getting used to their new CPAP machine. Ever heard of one of those things? It's for people with sleep apnea. That's when your airways collapse while you're sleeping and you stop breathing. And when the flow of oxygen gets cut off to your body, it sends a signal to your brain. Like an alarm, it throws you into a panic. Which is just your body's way to make you wake up and take in the oxygen that you so desperately need. Of course, if that internal alarm doesn't wake you up fast enough, bad things can happen. So they put you on a machine to push the air in and ensure you get all that you need while you sleep.

Like I said, it seems like the whole world's gasping for air these days. Maybe you know what that's like too. You might not suffer from sleep apnea. You might not have a problem wearing a mask. You might not have repeated the Minneapolis chant. But do you also know what it's like not to be able to breathe?

Was it playing contact sports, when you got the wind knocked out of you? Was it out swimming in the ocean, when that big wave came and left you frantic to break the surface again? Was it during that panic attack, or childbirth, or you-name-it that you were struggling to catch your breath?

Maybe it wasn't even a physical blow that took your breath away. Even a piece of bad news can feel like a punch in the gut. Phone calls can leave you breathless—"Hello, you there? Are you sitting down? Good. I'm sorry to have to tell you this . . . but there's been an accident." Or when you get served a set of papers emblazoned with the words, Petition for Divorce. Or when H.R. calls you in and says, "Look, the company's had to make some cuts. And while we appreciate the work you do, we're gonna have to let you go." It's times like these that the air gets sucked right out of the room.

Well, the disciples of Jesus also know firsthand what it's like to struggle for air. About fifty days ago, their breath was taken away as they watched their Lord and Messiah die on the cross. After that, they practically held their breath behind locked doors for fear of the Jews. And while they let out a sigh of relief when they saw their risen Messiah back from the dead, forty days later the wind would be taken out of their sails again. When Jesus ascended into heaven, they knew this was it. With Him gone, they were now on their own. What were they going to do without their Lord? With such heavy hearts, it must've been difficult to breathe. Would they ever catch their breath again?

Well, we come to find that out today. Y'know, it's interesting how the Book of Acts is really the second volume to Luke's Gospel. I mean, Luke is the human author of both his Gospel and the Book of Acts. And if we were to read them together, one after another, we would find that Acts picks up right where Luke's Gospel leaves off. It's obvious that they're meant to be read in conjunction as one seamless story.

Now, let's say we do a quick word search in Luke's Gospel, and look up the Greek word for spirit, that is, *pneuma*—which, by the way, can also be translated as both breath and wind. Can you guess when's the last time we find that word *pneuma* mentioned in the Gospel of Luke? Think about the story of Jesus—when do you hear about breath or spirit? . . . It's at the cross.

Just moments before, Jesus had used His final breaths to offer some last words. Words like, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." And words like, "Truly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in paradise." But also words like, "Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit!" And, Luke tells us, "having said this, He breathed His last."

So, did you catch that? How many times did you hear the word *pneuma* translated into English? Two times. First, when Jesus says, “into Your hands I commit my spirit!” And second, when we’re told that “He breathed His last.” Remember, *pneuma* means three things: spirit, breath and wind. Just as its Hebrew equivalent, *ruach*, also means the same three things: spirit, breath, and wind.

Now, what’s this got to do with anything? Well, Luke is doing something very deliberate here. If the cross is the last time we hear that word for breath or spirit mentioned in Luke’s Gospel, guess where we hear it again for the first time in Luke’s Book of Acts. The next time we hear this word is in chapter 2, our Second Reading this morning. It’s the Pentecost story.

There the disciples are, after being smothered, suffocated, stifled by the recent events of Jesus’ Passion and ascension into heaven. Their whole world came crashing down around them, and they’re still coughing from the dust. They wonder if they’ll ever feel the breath of life fill their lungs again. But then, Pentecost comes—God’s own patented CPAP machine for the Church.

Remember, what goes up must come down. So, if the breath of Jesus flew out of Him on Calvary and went up to God, it’s got to come back down somewhere. Well, today it lands on this group of disciples, when suddenly from heaven there came a sound like a mighty rushing wind that filled up the whole place where they were. Tongues of fire rest on them. The Holy Spirit now fills them and these disciples begin to speak in tongues as the Spirit gives them utterance.

What a scene that must’ve been. Rag tag fishermen turned into eloquent preachers! These lonesome and despairing men made alive with everlasting hope! Their sullen hearts now energized with a mission from God Himself! The very Spirit that hovered over the face of the waters at Creation now hovers over these disciples at the New Creation. The same breath of God that came into Adam and made him a living creature now resuscitates these disciples and makes them into immortal creatures.

No doubt, this is a turning point. We have plenty of examples of Jesus sending out His disciples, but then they stay put and don’t go anywhere. Either after Jesus first appeared to them on Easter, or then again eight days later to Thomas, or when He finds the disciples back on the water letting down their fishing nets. But not this time. Today, it’s different. After Pentecost, there’s no going back. These men will go out boldly at full speed and won’t slow down until their dying breath.

How’re things for you these days? Are you—like our world, like these disciples—gasping for air? Has something recently in your life knocked the wind out of you? Have you experienced something lately that has left you breathless? Or maybe you have something you need to get off your chest. Sin does that, you know. It weighs on you and constricts you, leaving you with little room to breathe. But if you’ve been wheezing lately, this morning Jesus gives you a chance to breathe easy.

You see, Christ is pouring out His Spirit on you in this place. It might not be as big and flashy as that first Pentecost. There’s no draft in the room. No one’s head’s catching on fire. And you won’t have to listen to me preach in a foreign tongue. But when you think about it, Pentecost pretty much happens here every single Sunday.

Like, here we are huddled in this room. And we’re all ready for the Spirit of God to breathe new life into us after a stifling week. Then, sure enough, the Holy Spirit swoops down not as a mighty rushing wind or tongues of fire, but with the same breath that was given to the disciples: the Word of Christ!

After all, what was the whole point of Pentecost? It was the preaching of the Gospel. It was to ensure that everyone gathered, from all nations, could hear the message of Jesus Christ in their own native tongue. And you know what happened after they did? They were so excited about the forgiveness of their sins through Jesus Christ, and about the promise of everlasting life in Him, that they just couldn’t keep it to themselves. So, when they went back home, they brought the Gospel with them. They took what they had received and they gave it out to their neighbors.

So, on Pentecost Jesus breathes on His disciples. The disciples breathe on those gathered to hear it. Those gathered to hear it then breathe on everyone back in their hometown. Don’t you see? The Spirit of God, the very breath of life, is in

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none other than the Word of Christ! Where the Word is, there's the Holy Spirit! The Spirit's what gives it power, makes it living and active! It might not be as big and flashy as what we read about today, but it's enough to turn our lives around like the disciples.

It's that very Word that you hear again today. The Word of Jesus Christ crucified for your sins and raised for your justification. The Word of forgiveness proclaimed to you in His name. The Word of consecration recited over the bread and wine on this altar to become the body and blood of the Lord for you. Remember, that Word is really the breath of God, the Holy Spirit, and He's still hovering over our faces to do His Genesis work. Breathing the breath of life into you, re-creating you, making you new. It's Pentecost happening all over again!

And if it's Pentecost, then when you leave today you too leave with a special mission. Having breathed in the breath of God, don't forget to exhale. You take in the Holy Spirit here so that you can give out the Holy Spirit there. Who knows, maybe when you share the Word of Christ, somebody in this suffocating world will find it to be a breath of fresh air.