

Pentecost Year C May 23, 2010
Confirmation Sunday
Pastor Tim Koester

(measuring spirit)

Grace and peace to you from God, who is...

Our creator

Our saving hope

And our **breath** of new and unending LIFE.

Today is a **spiritual** day, although not quite as spiritual as yesterday. How can I tell? Well there is a way to actually measure spirit using an anemometer like this. (*take out the wind meter and ask for various folks to blow to measure their "spirit"*) Today the spirit is blowing at about 5mph but yesterday it topped at out over 25 mph! Spirit is wind. It is breath. We talked about this last Sunday during the study hour and our conversation has stayed with me all week.

So today, as the church celebrates the gift of God's Spirit among us,
as we pray for a renewed outpouring of this Spirit in the lives of these five young people,
we also ask Luther's question, "What does this mean?" ... for us and for our lives?

Our word '**spirit**' has taken on a whole range of meanings, most of which describe something 'super' natural, mysterious and perhaps even frightening. Too often we associate *spirit* with the notion of disembodied *ghosts* made popular in scary movies and really bad reality TV. But "spirit" is rooted in the Latin word *spiritus* which simply means "**breath**" and **wind**. In the original language of the New Testament, the Greek word "*pneuma*" works the same way. That's the word we used to describe tools and equipment that work using air power. A *pneumatic* cylinder is an air cylinder. But the best word, I think, is the Hebrew word, *ruach*. It too means "breath" or "wind" but it's a lot more fun to say. The creation account of Genesis begins with the *ruach* of God hovering over the primordial waters and the breath of God speaking the world into existence. (*it's such a good word everybody needs to try saying it...*) Far from being something disembodied from real life, *spirit, pneuma, ruach*, make real **life** possible!

Today is a spiritual day, it is a windy day, it is a day of *ruach*. Not simply because the air is moving outside but more importantly because God's breath is moving among us, especially today among the five of you who will affirm the promises made to you in baptism. Baptism is a sign of God's claim upon us. It is God's watery word of grace poured out on us when we do not deserve it nor understand it. In baptism we are in a real sense "adopted" as children of God and as we grow, God nurtures us and helps us to trust that **we are who God says we are**: saved, forgiven, and loved children who do not have to be afraid! By trusting in God's love toward us, we are empowered to love others in this world of brokenness and pain.

This is what the good news is all about! This is what God asks us to be all about but it is easy to get distracted. One of you challenged me in class one day with this very honest statement, "**I don't get**

what church is all about.” That had such an impact on me that I wrote it down on a sticky note and put it on my computer where I look at it nearly every day.

Some days it is a challenge to figure out what the church is all about. On those days I am usually struggling with my own failures, fears, and selfishness. It becomes easy to focus on what is going wrong in the world, and going wrong in the church. Differences divide us. Apathy suffocates us and there is pain and hurting every which way you turn. How can getting out of bed on Sunday morning, sitting in a hard pew, listening to some person talk, singing songs, and eating the tiniest of meals help with any of that? Some days taking things on faith seems so frustrating and pointless. Philip’s demand in the gospel text today is the same one I have some days. “Show us the Father, and then we will be satisfied”. Give us some proof, God, that you are here among us. There are problems that need your help. There are people who need to change their ways and God, you could make them see the light.

But then the *ruach* blows...-occasionally as strong as the wind yesterday but more often like the gentle breeze we feel today and I realize that many of my demands for God to show up are directed at someone else! Seldom do I want God to change me or my ways. Rarely do I want to face the truth about myself – that I am needy, afraid, and uncertain. I need help to answer the most important questions in life...“Who am I?” “What am I here for?” and “Does anybody really love me?” I’m hoping that what the church “is about” has something to do with these kinds of deep questions.

It is the **life-giving Spirit** of God who comes to us in these moments, not in some kind of strange, out-of-body experience, but rather in the real flesh and blood of another person. That is why Jesus told Philip that whoever has seen him, has seen the Father. In the person of Jesus, was all the fullness of God. All of God’s love -All of God’s mercy -All of God’s compassion -All of God’s judgment upon sin was present in Jesus.. so that we can have real life answers to our most important questions.

“Who am I?” You are a child of God and a brother or sister to Jesus. “What am I here for?” You are here to do the works Jesus did. You are here to love God and one another by the power of the same Spirit present with Jesus. “Does anybody really love me?” Look to the cross. That is how much God loves you. There are no conditions, no strings attached, no requirements to be a good person. God loves you simply because you are you and God is God. Believing that truth transforms our lives and works to heal our brokenness but we need help to believe!

That is what Pentecost is all about! The spirit of God comes and makes a home in us regular ol’ people. Through the community of faith, God speaks life-giving words in a language we can understand. The Spirit of God produces a kind of “fruit” and the walls of the youth room downstairs remind us of what they are: Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faith, gentleness, self-control. **These are the things that church is all about.** These are the real-life works of God that can be seen and felt in the world. God calls **each of you** who are affirming your faith, and indeed **all of us**, to be the hands and feet and voice of God in the world. And although we don’t have a handy little device like an anemometer to measure spiritual strength, I do have this! Everytime you speak kindness, everytime you show love, everytime you bring joy into the life of someone else, God’s **Spirit** is blowing through you and giving **life** to the world. That is what the church is all about! That is the **life** God’s *ruach* breathes into us.