



Life-giving Spirit

May 11, 2008

Focus scripture Acts 2:1–21

Additional scriptures
Numbers 11:24–30
Psalm 104:24–34, 35b
1 Corinthians 12:3b–13
John 20:19–23 or
John 7:37–39

Breathe upon us,
Holy Spirit of God,
with gifts of new
life, new inspira-
tion, and fresh
energy to witness
to your saving love.
Breathe upon us,
Holy Spirit of God,
and fit us for serv-
ing in your realm.
Amen.

This Pentecost Sunday we celebrate God's life-giving Spirit poured out abundantly on the community of disciples. Rich images of wind and fire frame the proclamation of God's power in words that all can understand. Community is extended by the Spirit's blessing through a diversity of persons and gifts for the common good.

Focus Scripture: Acts 2:1–21

The Jewish harvest festival of Pentecost is linked, by some Jewish scholars, with the gift of the Law at Sinai. God's law and covenant were the foundation of the community of Israel, described in the Hebrew Scriptures. In the focus reading, the writer of Acts describes God's giving of the Spirit on the day of Pentecost following Jesus' resurrection as the foundation of a new community living in covenant with God, the Body of Christ.

The writer of Acts speaks of the phenomena on that day of Pentecost as "like" the wind and "as of" fire. Equally amazing, the gathered crowd marvels as they hear the gospel in their native languages. Explanations of how this might have taken place pale in comparison to what those words convey. When one hears the gospel in one's own language, how is it possible to ignore the Pentecost truth that God comes in Spirit to each one of us?

Peter and the disciples are witnesses to God's acts of grace and love in Christ, and an international assembly receives their words. Acts lists an intriguing variety of peoples that made up the crowd on that day. In spite of critics who question their authenticity, the disciples continue to speak the truth they know.

At that day of Pentecost after Jesus' resurrection, all hear about God's deeds of power. Some wonder what the words of testimony mean. Others wonder if the disciples are drunk. Even the Spirit does not guarantee agreement. In Hebrew, the word for "hear" also means "obey." The gift of the Spirit at Pentecost unleashes the Spirit's power in the disciples; power that strengthens faithful living and witness. The conclusion to the story of Pentecost is yet to be written.

In **Numbers 11:24–30** we read another account of God pouring out Spirit in ways that do not follow

human convention. Joshua complains against the prophesying of two "unauthorized" persons. Joshua's complaint is not unlike that of later disciples who whine about someone who is "not with us" casting out demons in Jesus' name (Luke 9:49–50). Moses, as does Jesus, turns aside the murmuring. God's Spirit will be given to whom God chooses.

This mighty work of God's Spirit is celebrated by the psalmist in **Psalm 104:24–34, 35b**, singing of God's Spirit breathing life upon all creatures, not human beings alone. God's Spirit renews the face of the ground.

The nature of God's Spirit is the focus of the additional texts. The Spirit comes not only as a gift from God, according to **1 Corinthians 12:3b–13**, but with gifts for the Body of Christ. With the Spirit's gifts come responsibilities to employ them for the common good. John's gospel provides its own "Pentecost" event in **John 20:19–23**, telling how Jesus breathes upon the disciples. In Greek as in Hebrew, "spirit," "breath," and "wind" are expressed by the same word. In **John 7:37–39**, Jesus links the promised gift of Spirit with "living water." In the arid Near East, water served as a powerful image for life. God's Spirit flows, not settles.



On this Pentecost Sunday, celebrate the gift of the Holy Spirit that blesses each child of God and all creation. This Spirit, which sustained Jesus in the wilderness as the Season of Lent began, makes possible our journey as disciples. The Spirit forms community from a variety of God's gifts. What signs of God's Spirit are growing more visible in your own life and in the life of your church?

Go to www.spiritseasons.com and click on Spirit Sightings for international current events, links to this week's theme, discussion questions, and intercessory prayer suggestions.

