**Pentecost Sunday**

**June 8, 2014**

**In the name of the God of all Creation**

**The God alive in each of us as God was alive in Jesus,**

**And the power of God known in the Spirit.**

**Amen.**

The Feast of Pentecost has its origins in the Jewish feast of Shavuot. Shavuot is a harvest feast that happens 50 days after Passover. Thus the timing of Pentecost … 50 days after Easter. The “pente” in Pentecost is from the Greek “penta” meaning five, as in Pentateuch … the first five books of our Bible … and the same as in Pentagon.

Let’s just be glad that the New Testament was written in Greek and not Latin … although there are Latin copies out there. I don’t know if you heard the announcement from the NFL this week about next year’s Super Bowl. It will be the 50th Super Bowl. Their logo has always used Roman numerals, so last year, number 49 was XXXXIX. That feels full of testosterone! But, if they were to use a Roman numeral for this year do you know what it would be? Yes, it would be L … L as in “loser.” So instead the NFL is making an exception and using Arabic numerals as in the numeral “5” and the numeral “0.” No telling what this feast today would be called if it was tagged with a Roman numeral.

Anyhow, we normally think of Pentecost as the descent of the Spirit for the birth of the church. The Spirit came down and caused all the believers to speak in different languages. All that is true, but the saga of the Spirit is far more profound; it began not with the birth of the church but before the beginning of time and the creation of the cosmos. The very first sentence of the Bible mentions the Spirit, describing how at the mysterious beginnings of the universe God's Spirit hovered over all creation like a protective mother.

*1In the beginning when God created*[*\**](javascript:void(0);) *the heavens and the earth, 2the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God*[*\**](javascript:void(0);) *swept over the face of the waters.*

That “wind from God” is the Hebrew word *ruach*, which is also translated “breath” and “spirit.”

Wind, breath, spirit … so just what is it, and how do we experience the Spirit of God? I think it is safe to say that we have all had times when events and people somehow come together and change our lives forever. Are those synchronistic moments merely coincidences, or is the divine somehow involved? How do we know something is of God’s spirit rather than our own ego, or need to justify an action, or maybe nothing more than an excuse?

This breath/wind/Spirit is what brought this Creation into being … and it is what gives each of life. Sometimes we take that breath … that spirit … for granted. Sitting here in the pews we do not pay much attention to our lungs breathing in and out. And sometimes we don’t pay that much attention to God’s Spirit at work around us and within us … yet God’s Spirit is a very powerful force when we listen to it … a force that can lead us to living into the fullness of the image of God.

I’m not one of those people who uses God’s Spirit as an absentee authority to justify my actions. I’m not one to release myself from responsibility by saying that the “Holy Spirit” made me do this or that, any more than I would say the devil made me do this or that. However, I know that God’s Holy Spirit has worked in my life. I would not be in this pulpit this morning if that were not the case.

In 2007 I was serving St. John’s Episcopal Church in Northampton, Massachusetts. St. John’s was a large parish and the church was completely surrounded by the Smith College campus. However, it had gone through some difficult times and I had been called to serve them as a long-term interim … basically to put thing back together before they called their next full time rector.

In the spring of 2007 my 83 year-old mother, who lived in Asheville, North Carolina, was hospitalized with pneumonia, and Caren and I planned a trip right after Easter to visit her. So, on Easter Sunday Caren and we began our two day journey. The first leg of our journey … about 550 miles … took us to our vacation home in West Virginia where we encountered eight inches of snow. We spent several hours late that night packing a trailer and the next morning, when we left West Virginia, it was still snowing. It was not easy driving … we were now towing a trailer through the mountains as we drove the 425 miles to Asheville.

When we arrived at my mother’s home I was exhausted from the Holy Week and Easter schedule of services at St. John’s and two long days of hard driving. But I was delighted to see my mother who, in spite of her COPD, looked better than we had expected.

After a nice dinner with my mother, my two sisters, and one of my brothers and his wife, my mother headed for bed. My sister, Jane, then asked if I would be the one to “listen” to my mother through the night. My mother was on oxygen and it seemed that there had been times when the oxygen supply had been interrupted as she slept … her compressor had malfunctioned, or the oxygen hose had become disconnected, or my mother had inadvertently pulled the oxygen off her face in her sleep. Without oxygen, my mother would go into distress. To avoid this my sisters had installed a “baby monitor” at my mother’s bedside and then each of them, on a rotating schedule, would sleep in the next room and listen to her breathe throughout the night.

When Jane asked if I would be the one to “listen” to my mother I was annoyed. I was worn out and I was looking forward to finally having a good night’s sleep. But I kept my feelings to myself and went to bed with my ear right next to the monitor’s speaker.

Questions kept me awake for some time. What if I fell asleep so soundly that I missed an event? What if I misunderstood the sounds … the compressor in the background, or the fan near her bed … and thought she was breathing when she wasn’t? What if she died on my watch? These anxieties and more kept my eyes open for a long time.

Then I was startled out of my sleep. I could not hear my mother’s breath through the monitor. I jumped up and went to her room. She was fine … it was just the bed clothes that were muffling the sounds. I went back to bed and drifted off to sleep, only to be re-awakened by her coughing. Coughing was a problem for her. If her coughing lasted too long she would need help sitting up, and then need her back “pounded” before she could go back to sleep. But the fact that she was coughing meant that she was breathing … it was good news tinged with anxiety.

As I lie there in the middle of the night listening to my mother breathe there was another breath/wind/Spirit that I also began to hear. I heard my mother’s breath … and I listened to my own. She was the one that had given me breath and now we were breathing together … again. As she struggled to breathe I struggled with her … a room away … but as if our hearts were beating in tandem. I was transformed that night by her breath … and transformed by God’s Spirit. It was one of the most intimate and sacred experiences I have ever known. What had started with annoyance had ended with blessing and grace.

On this journey after Easter Caren and I traveled over 3,600 miles. That gave us a lot of time to talk, to think, to meditate, and to pray. It was not just a journey of distance or time, it was a journey of spirit. Listening to my mother’s breath had opened me to hear the breath of God … it had breathed through a crack in my spiritual armor and had reached into my soul.

In my life-long journey of spirit and faith I have learned to listen to God’s Spirit in all its many forms. And as I listened to God’s Spirit on this post-Easter journey seven years ago I heard a calling to give to my family … and to myself … the same pastoral care that I have given to others in my years of parish ministry.

I resigned from St. John’s that June and we moved here to St. Augustine. The next few months were spent driving between here and Asheville to visit my mother and to assist my siblings in caring for her … and spending nights listening to her breathing. My mother was now receiving hospice home care. She died in October on the eighth anniversary of my father’s death. It was after her death that I found St. Cyprian’s and began attending as a parishioner.

I know I would not be a priest in the Church if I had not listened to God’s Spirit. And I know I would not be here at St. Cyprian’s had I not heard God’s Spirit blowing in the wind. I don’t know how God’s Spirit may work in your life. But I know God’s Spirit is real for me … and if it is real for me then God certainly makes it available to you as well … it is not something that is reserved for just a few.

The Hebrew creation tradition adopted by the earliest Christians has always been radically inclusive … nothing ever has or could exist outside the original "hovering"/”brooding” love of the Spirit of God. That is what we are celebrating today on Pentecost. Nothing in all creation can ever separate us from this divine love. All that God originally created is continually sustain by God, and will ultimately be redeemed through God’s Spirit. And it is that very Spirit that sent tongues of fire upon the gathered community at Pentecost causing them to speak in many languages.

The Spirit has come — everywhere, always, for all.

In the name of the God of all creation,

The God alive in us as God was alive in Jesus,

And the power of God known in the Spirit.

Amen.