

Acts 2:1-21

Elizabeth Bloch

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Day of Pentecost

Year A

John 20:19-23

The Breath of God

What do you think of when you hear those words - the Breath of God? Do you think of the gentle, comfortable old hymn, *Breathe on me, Breath of God, Fill me with life anew...*? When I was growing up it was always sung very, very quietly during communion or as a hushed benediction at the end of Morning Prayer. Or maybe you never learned that hymn, and the Breath of God sounds like an exotic perfume (there is one on the market!) or the Breath of God might be a thriller set in a secluded monastery or a legendary potion in an Indiana Jones movie. Or maybe it simply sounds like a sacred mystery you've never really thought about. Whatever idea comes to you when you hear those words, please be still with me for a moment and call it into to your mind. The Breath of God... what do those words mean to you?

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Today, Pentecost, is the feast of The Breath of God, the feast of God the Holy Spirit, God the inspirer – *ruach* in Hebrew, *pneuma* in Greek – the feast of God's Breath... and there is actually nothing comfortable or quiet or exotic or hushed about the story of God's Breath on the day of Pentecost.

The God we hear about today breathes fire and wind and power and Resurrection life into first 12, then 120, then 3000 disciples at a time. The Breath of God was a mighty, wild, uncontrollable, rafter-shaking wind that re-arranged everything in its path, not just the light-weight, stackable patio chairs. The Breath of God swooped and spun through that upper room in Jerusalem and sparked flames everywhere it touched, setting the disciples heads on fire with flames that would never cool...

Remember, it was the Breath of God that Jesus breathed on the disciples when he came to them after the Resurrection, breathing on them as God had breathed life into Adam, giving *them* the real power of life or death that is *forgiveness*...

In fact, the Breath of God on Pentecost morning burned with such heat and power it turned the disciples themselves into fire-givers. Before they knew it they were changed, changed until they hardly could recognize one another they were so transformed by the fiery Breath of God. By then, the whole house was filled with wind and fire and they were filled to bursting. In fact, the air that was God's Breath did burst out of them with sounds they'd never made in their lives, and tongues that hadn't been unscrambled since the tower of Babel were clear to everyone within breathing distance. No one was left out. Frightened, quiet people turned into clarion-voiced prophets, the brash and presumptuous were refined into pure flames of light and love, the aimless and lost found themselves forged into strength and purpose with the wind of God's Breath at their back and a pillar of fire to lead them. Every one was transformed by that mighty wind. Everything and everyone in its path was re-arranged.

On the day of Pentecost, the feast of the Breath of God, we are reminded of other accounts of the works of God's Breath –

At creation - *the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, when a breath from God swept over the face of the waters*¹ and it all began.... *then the Lord God formed Adam from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and Adam became a living being.*²

In the valley of dry bones - *Thus says the Lord God to these bones: I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live³... and the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood on their feet, a vast multitude.⁴*

With Moses at the burning bush - *the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire out of a bush; Moses looked, and the bush was blazing, yet it was not consumed...⁵ When the Lord saw that he had turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, "Moses, Moses!"⁶*

In the pillar of fire leading the Exodus people through the desert⁷... and later at Mount Sinai - *the appearance of the glory of the Lord was like a devouring fire on the top of the mountain in the sight of the people of Israel.⁸*

From Malachi, Psalms, Jeremiah, Job... - *But who can endure the day of his coming, and who can stand when he appears? For he is like a refiner's fire⁹...*

The voice of the Lord flashes forth flames of fire.¹⁰... Is not my word like fire, says the Lord¹¹... By the breath of God ice is given, and the broad waters are frozen fast.¹²

From Jesus in the Gospel of John - *The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit, that is the Breath of God.¹³*

Jesus had told the disciples that they would be *clothed with power when they were baptized by the Holy Spirit¹⁴*, and that wind and fire swept through their hearts and minds and lives and worship until, as the old desert father Abba Joseph said it, they *became all flame*.

If the Breath of God is the creation power that exploded into all the universe we know, then it is indeed risky business. For it has always re-arranged everything in its path. That's certainly what happened to the disciples when they breathed in that fiery Breath of God they had been waiting and praying for. They were changed and changed and changed and changed, and so were all the people and places they touched, whether it was 2 or 3, or 3000 gathered together. The disciples inhaled the Breath of God from their Lord and then used their own lungs, their own bodies and souls, to breathe out their gift from God, to exhale God's Breath into the world wherever they went. Because on that day of Pentecost, there might as well have been no doors or walls at all in that upper room where they were waiting when that mighty wind from God blew through and set their heads and hearts on fire.

But now what about us? Is this fire-breathing, powerful God someone we know and love and wait and pray for? Do we want to be changed like this? Do we dare to breathe in the mighty wind of God and be transformed into fire-givers ourselves? Or have we – 2011 years later - tacitly agreed to offer cautious and decorous prayers to a Sunday morning God whom we actually expect should change our lives very little, if at all?

Saints of St.Paul's, you and I can be set on fire with the Breath of God just as those first Pentecost disciples were. We can be filled with such heat and power, the love of our God will be a fountain of flames pouring out of us to every one, without exception, no holds barred, no one left out.

There are only two questions in our way: The first is: Do we believe in that mighty, uncontrollable, rafter-shaking Breath of God that re-arranged everything in its path? After that, we're down to one question: Do we want to be changed?

¹ Genesis 1:2

² Genesis 2:7

³ Ezekiel 37:5

⁴ Ezekiel 37:10

⁵ Exodus 3:2

⁶ Exodus 3:4

⁷ Exodus 13

⁸ Exodus 24:17

⁹ Malachi 3:2

¹⁰ Psalm 29:7

¹¹ Jeremiah 23:29

¹² Job 37:10

¹³ John 3:8

¹⁴ Luke 24:49; Matthew 3; Mark 1; John 1