

Lord, send the gift of your Spirit to fill this place and ourselves and the world. Touch us with truth that burns like fire, with beauty that moves us like the wind and set us free, free to see and listen and wonder again at the gracious mystery of all that is. Amen.

A number of people reported during the pandemic that, whether due to the threat of the virus or the isolation it imposed, many people experienced more vivid dreams than usual. The virus also seemed to have the effect of reminding me, and perhaps you, of events that I had forgotten about, times of stress or discomfort. One of those memories was of a not-fun-at-all scuba dive in Monterey Bay, California. My husband was a keen scuba diver and discovered that Monterey Bay was a good dive spot. So on a trip to CA, we went out on the bay on a dive boat. It was a beautiful northern California day with sun and blue sky but also wind. The Pacific is notoriously cold so we had to put on extra thick wetsuits, including helmets, which take so much effort to put on that you feel as if you've already had your workout by the time you suit up. We left the dock and as we got out into the bay, the breeze freshened, as they say, and I quickly got thoroughly seasick. It is a horrible feeling and the only solution was to get in the water and get under the waves which we did. My only experiences diving had been in lovely warm Caribbean waters with lots of fish and coral of every color and shape. Monterey Bay on the other hand is a kelp forest which didn't mean much to me until we started to descend. A kelp forest, at least the one there, is an impenetrable stand of tough, leathery blades of algae that sway aggressively in the swell. They block out most of the light and there are very few fish that live in them. Pushing through them is not easy. So the only thing I remember is the darkness, the claustrophobia, and the cold. It was a miserable experience and I don't think we spent more than 5 minutes on the bottom. Even the thought of being seasick on board the boat seemed better than fighting those kelp in that sepulchral gloom. We swam back up and got on board the heaving boat and I have never been so happy to step onto a dock in my life. In more recent years, the kelp forest of northern California has become endangered

which is causing an ecological crisis for all the marine life.
If I had only known what was to come, I would have hugged those kelp
and said, I love you. You're important. Hang in there.

Why am I bringing this up now? For 2 reasons.

One is that living through Covid reminded me
of trying to navigate that underwater world –
dark, gloomy, surrounded on all sides by dense obstacles
that need to be pushed aside to make any progress at all.

And you never get to the end, to open water.

The other reason I bring it up is because today is the Day of Pentecost,
just in case you missed the balloons and the pinwheels!

As most of you know and we all just heard,
this is the day when the Holy Spirit arrived on earth,
specifically to the disciples who were praying in a house.

It was not a quiet event.

The Spirit made a dramatic entrance with wind and fire
and caused the disciples to testify and pray in languages they didn't even know.

Two of the Spirit's attributes or symbols – wind and breath –
are just the opposite of slogging through a forest of kelp.

The colors of this day – red, yellow, orange –
contrast with the darkness of the underwater world
and the ordeal we have been through.

The Spirit's movements have all the attributes of life –
warmth v darkness, air v water, and lightness v heaviness.

So this day might be both a celebration of Pentecost
and also a celebration of this new phase of life we just entered
where the stranglehold of the virus is easing,
the requirements for masks have been loosened
and we are freer to move around.

Andrew Weil, an MD who has written a number of books on health,
has an excellent talk on meditation and breath.

In it he explains that the act of breathing is really
the center of power in our bodies.

As we take in oxygen and convert it to CO₂,
that conversion releases energy that we use to do everything
from sleeping to running marathons.

Breathing is what gives us energy.

That's why athletes train at high altitudes where there is less air pressure.

If they can run fast at 6000', they can run really fast at sea level.
There is then a connection between breath and energy or breath and spirit
as many languages suggest.
They use the same word for breath and spirit.
Prana in Sanskrit means breath and spirit
as does *ruach* in Hebrew, *pneuma* in Greek and *spiritus* in Latin.
English doesn't reflect that connection except in words
like respire or respiration.
So there's this universal understanding that breath and spirit are one.
When we focus on our breath,
our conscious and unconscious minds come together.
Great spiritual leaders of all types have known this truth for years.
That's why so many forms of meditation use breath work as their foundation.
In our breathing we engage the pulse of the universe,
joining our breath to its steady beat.
If you're having a hard time connecting to God,
know that God is as close as your breath.
In those breaths are both power and connection.
In those breaths is the Spirit of God.
And here we are on this day when we celebrate that breath, that wind,
that gift of God's Spirit among us.
Jesus said that God was sending the HS to be a comfort.
And one of the aspects of the Spirit's comfort,
might be the movement of breathing, the sound of breathing,
its steadiness, its rhythm.
Just for a moment, let's all close our eyes and just concentrate on the Spirit's
lifegiving breath moving in and out of us – steady, regular, lifegiving.

In today's reading the apostles are assembled in that upper room,
where they had eaten the Last Supper with Jesus.
They are there devoting themselves to prayer
waiting for the coming of God's Spirit as Jesus had promised.
And all of a sudden, a wind blows through the room and the Spirit is there.
A Spirit who comes as both wind and flame.
Fire is another aspect of the Spirit.
The Spirit is fiery because she is both strong and tough,
like a parent, loving but demanding, with expectations.
In the story today, the Spirit is determined to send her children,
the apostles, into the world.
She's got out her broom and she's sweeping them out the door.

Shoo, she says, get going.
Get out of that nice, safe room, even if you are praying.
There is lots of work that needs to be done.
The Spirit is saying, Jesus promised that I would come and I have.
And now we all need to work together, for the welfare of the world.
ALL of us. Jew and Gentile, slave and free. Coloradans and Texans.
Proud Boys and Antifa. Blue states and red states.
When Paul talks about the Spirit in 1st Corinthians
he says that the gifts we are given are activated by the Spirit.
The verb activated is energeo, energy.
The Spirit came among the disciples and the Spirit is among us
to energize us to go and DO things.
The gifts that we've been given are not to be saved for some rainy day
or shared with only a select few.
They are to be shared with whoever needs them.
That's why the apostles had to get out of that nice safe room.
There was work to be done.
The HS is both the breath that sustains us and the fire that energizes us
and gets us going, inspires us – inSPIRation, get it?
The Spirit says, I breathe life into you so you can go out
and breathe life into others.
I am lighting a fire in you so that you can go out
and kindle fires of action and love around the world.
Take a breath. Now just keep breathing.
This is God's moment-by-moment gift to us.
We can call it air or we can call it Holy Spirit.
The Spirit counts on us to warm it up, to lend it our lives.
In return, she promises to fill us with new wind.
To paraphrase Annie Dillard,
We can't create wind; the most we can do is to try and put ourselves in its path.
Wind or Spirit has force: you rig a giant sail and go.
Hone and spread your spirit till you yourself are a sail,
whetted, translucent, broadside to the merest puff of the Spirit. Amen.