

TUMC Pentecost Sermon 2017¹

Today is my last sermon with you as your lead pastor even though I'm working until the end of June.

With our retreat next week, the farewell on the 18th and launch of the summer series on June 25th, this part of my role comes to an end after today.

And as I thought about what I would say, the phrase that kept coming to me was "just preach the gospel."

That's actually all we really try to do with sermons, preach a word of good news into a world that needs the good news of Jesus Christ.

And today's good news flows out of the story of Pentecost.

Pentecost is a celebration of the Holy Spirit/Breath of God as it creates, renews and empowers the church. From the breath of life that hovered over the waters of creation, according to Genesis, to the breath that renews the face of the earth and begins fresh life according to Psalm 104, to the Holy breath that gives the followers of Jesus new life and power at Pentecost, today is the day we celebrate receiving that breath of life.

Why is this such a big deal?

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It's a big deal

because we cannot take for granted the breath of life – the presence of God's breath in us.

We, each of us, have been caught up in a system that is creating the world now in our own image.

They call it the Anthropocene age, an epoch in the history of the earth named after the human species because we have impacted the world to such a degree that we are leaving a carbon footprint of our presence here that will be discernable in the rocks and waters and ice of this planet's future.

Humans in their tendency towards wanting to become like gods – and wanting to make a name for ourselves – like at the tower of Babel of old – we have “become a world force,

We have been drawing our many different languages as decreed by God at the tower of Babel

into a single language.

Our single language now is one of commerce and capitalism and the echo chamber of social media algorithm feedback loops.

With those forces our human industry has breathed a breath that means not life, but death for the world.

We call this breath “carbon” for short, but it is nothing more than the negative breath of lives lived beyond their limits.²

Quoting from a commentator I read this week:

“It is into this world of deathly exhalations that the Holy Breath comes. Rather than unifying the many languages into one, Holy Breath is a Spirit that can speak to all in their own tongue. And it is indigenous in that it can live according to the language of the place it enters not forcing that place to conform to its gridlines and speech patterns.”

And we are barely aware of all the indigenous languages in the places we find ourselves.

most obviously first, because our system of so called civilization through commercialization and colonialism has almost completely wiped out the indigenous languages that were here before us, but also because the noise of our cities often drown out the indigenous language of our natural world.

This has happened so much so we have almost ceased to hear the language of the trees and rocks and the soil.

If we listen carefully to them we would hear that they are proclaiming their maker’s praise.

I say almost, because I know that there are some who still hear and moments when most of us can hear that praise if we try.

² Ragan Sutterfield. posted June 1st Wild Lectionary: The Coming of the Holy Breath – helped me to articulate this

I know someone from our congregation who has honed her knowledge of trees and the language of trees to such an extent that she can close her eyes in a new location and point to and move towards the largest and oldest tree in her vicinity.

There is scientific corroboration now for how trees communicate through their root systems and through scent and electrical impulses, not entirely unlike humans,

but there are always those among us who have not needed this corroboration to

“know” the indigenous languages of the natural world of which we are part.

The life breath of God moves in all the world. All creatures are dependent for life on their creator according to Psalm 104. If the Eternal One opens Her hand – all creatures are well satisfied, but if she closes Her hand the creatures of the earth are terrified,

Take away their breath – they die and return to dust.

Eternal One, if You send back your breath, fresh life begins and the face of the earth is renewed - alleluia

And the life breath of God is available to us all and celebrated on this day – the day of Pentecost.

The Good news of Jesus Christ is Life and the power of life over death through the Holy breath or Holy Spirit of God.

And we need the power of life over death today as much or more than ever.

Someone this week reminded me that what the world needs now is nothing short of spiritual transformation.

Scientific optimism of the modern era and the science of the post modern era can observe and describe our planet in increasingly sophisticated ways, but what science cannot do is provide the spiritual transformation we need to deal with where we find ourselves as a human society.

The Holy Spirit or Breath of God is what is needed for the complete spiritual transformation we need for ourselves and for the natural world of which we are part.

The Holy Breath of God – what is it really?

Think of a time in your life when you felt like you received that breath of life in a creative, renewing, empowering kind of way.

Think of a time when you felt most alive

Whenever I get out of the car when I arrive at the cabin, the first thing I do is take a deep breath.

I breathe in air that smells and feels deeply good.

It's the first act of receiving the gift of the place.

Maybe you've done this too.

You've arrived at a lake or an ocean or a forested campsite
or walked along the Humber river or walked in the Rouge valley or
along the lakeshore
or even in your local park. Our city has lots of those.
Or you spend time in your own shady back yard
and you take a big breath as one of the first things that you do
because it is in these places that we can still feel the pulse of the natural
world.

Or maybe you feel most alive when you move your body – playing
sports, walking, running, gardening?

Or maybe it's when you sing that you feel most alive – using the
instrument of your vocal chords and your lungs and diaphragm deeply.

Or maybe you feel most alive when your own creative life bears fruit
that brings joy and love and life to others – here in this community, or in
your work or family life where joy and laughter or tears if appropriate
bring us closer to each other and God. Laughter and tears by the way
require deep breaths.

Every time we take a deep breath we bear witness not only to our need
for, but our desire for life.

and each breath

each deep breath fills us and connects us with the world and creation
that God made as our home

So here's the deal.

If we need life,

if we need the Spirit's life and the Spirit's transformation in our lives so that we can be part of the spiritual transformation of our world, dare I say even **lead** the spiritual transformation of our world, we first have to receive it.

We have to receive the same Holy breath that filled the disciples at Pentecost.

We cannot and will not be transformed unless we open our lungs; the lungs of our bodies, the lungs of our hearts, the lungs of our very spirits, to receive the spirit of life, the breath of life today celebrated as wind and fire wind to blow away the deathly exhalations that have gone beyond safe and natural limits and fire to burn up the impurities of the world we have been part of creating in our own image.

Today I invite all of you to receive

and now - receive communion,

I invite you to receive the communion elements – *like breath and holy breath*

These simple elements grape juice and bread connect us to the earth and sharing them together connects us to each other.

These things are sacred elements in that they are capable just like we are of holding the sacred and of communicating the sacred to us. Traditionally we Mennonites celebrate communion by serving each other, in order to emphasize the priesthood of all believers and while I hold to the importance of that, today instead I want all of us to receive from Christ. Yes, we can and should be Christ for each other, but when we focus on serving we forget that we are first served by Christ the Christ who knelt at his disciples' feet and served them washing and drying their feet and then offering his own life, his own breath, so that they could live. No one has had more love than this, but that he is willing to lay down his life for his friends. Jesus calls you his friends and wants to offer you his life at this communion table He wants to offer you life and ask that you remember and receive the gift of his life here.

This is Christ's table.

All are welcome at Christ's table.

All who want to receive the life of Christ are invited to this table.

No matter your age or expressed faith to this point

if you want to receive the offer of Christ's life,

if you want to open yourself to the Holy breath/spirit of God in this way,

come forward and take a piece of the gluten free bread and dip it into
the grape juice -
the body of Christ that was given for you and the life of the world
and the life force of Christ that was poured out for you and for the life of
the world.

Let us pray,

Communion prayer – *adapted from p.91 in the Minister’s manual*

Almighty God, Creator of heaven and earth,
you formed the earth with your hovering Spirit
and molded us in your image from the humus of the earth.

With mercy higher than the mountains
and grace deeper than the seas
you called and led your people
into the wilderness so that they might be shaped in your image
into a new creation.

When we still didn’t understand
you came to us through the life and death
of the Messiah, Jesus,
who showed us the life that was offered through you
and could be remembered through the simple gifts of bread and wine
the fruits of the earth.

In this way, Jesus renewed your covenant with us.

Gathered at his table, we remember his life lived and offered up for others.

In dying, he set us free from death.

In rising, he opened the way to eternal life.

Send now your Holy Spirit, your Holy Breath on us and on this meal, so that we might receive both the life and the power of that life that he offered

and share that life with the world by witnessing to the joy we find in him.

We ask this through our Savior
who taught us to pray

Our Father

Our Mother

Instructions and invitation for communion

After the words of institution, I invite you to come to share in the gifts of God prepared for the people of God by taking a piece of the gluten free bread and dipping it into the grape juice.

On the night that Jesus was betrayed he took a loaf of bread
and after giving thanks

he broke it and gave it to them

saying , take and eat

this is my body given for you

Do this in remembrance of me.

In the same way, he took the cup also after supper, saying, “ This cup is the new covenant in my blood; when you drink it together, remember me.”

Prayer for the Bread and Cup

God of grace,

Thank you for this bread and cup of Christ, blessed by earth, hand, and heaven.

May your Spirit feed us with this bread and satisfy us with this cup, nourishing our bodies, minds, and spirits.

Participation in communion

The bread of life,

The cup of salvation

Post communion prayer

God of love,

We bless you, O God, for your healing love and your gift of salvation, for your gracious gifts of bread and cup.

We bless you for nourishing us in the love of this community and for sustaining us in hope.

We pray for your strength to prepare us for your service as we offer to you our lives of worship and witness in the world you have made.

Sermon Part 2

Only now do we get to serve the world.

Only when we know that Christ has first served us

and only when we have received the gift of the breath of God, the Holy Spirit of God

are we equipped with the power we will need to serve and to share this gift with others.

There's an entire world out there that needs a spiritual transformation and it's a motley crew of Jesus followers like us who get to lead it.

Remember those first followers of Jesus –

the ones who often didn't get it

the ones who fell down over and over again

fighting over who was the greatest

misunderstanding Jesus at every turn

fleeing when their own lives were in danger

and betraying him with denial and fear.

those are the ones whom Jesus served by kneeling at their feet and then equipping them with the power of Holy Spirit life.

Good news,

that Holy Spirit/Breath of God is available to us in the same way over and over again.

Like the rhythm of breathing

in and out, in and out,

the Spirit breath of God fills us so that we can breathe out life and not death

to our world.

With the life and breath of the Spirit we get
to live fruitfully as part of the new creation that Jesus' life and victory
over death inaugurated.

Wherever our lives take us, we get to participate in the life and power of
Christ for the world
Thanks be to God.

And now, as participants in the new creation, let us acknowledge each
other as those who have been served and fed and revived by the Holy
Breath

Let us now acknowledge the joy of this and each other with a greeting of
peace,

Let us pass the peace of Christ,
and invite each other to serve the earth and the world as we have been
served.

Amen

