

July 3, 2016 Pentecost 7

Genesis 1: 2

“...while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters.”

Summer in Canada is a time for getting out of doors and enjoying the elements. For the next few weeks and then again in August, we will be looking at our faith through the Four Elements of Creation: Wind, Water, Earth and Fire. Today we begin with Wind or air.

Wind is the only one, of the 4 elements that is invisible. Normally air lacks any discernible form or colour or texture, but it makes everything else come alive both literally, as in the gift of life-giving breath, and figuratively, as in the buffeting of things by the wind's power.

Wind also carries scents of living things, harbingers of places, creatures and habitations. In Genesis we are told that a mighty wind was present at the beginning of creation. Our religious association of Wind with divine activity goes back thousands of years.

Now we know that Wind is air in motion caused by differences in atmospheric pressure; that is the thickness/height of the air column. The higher the column of air the greater the weight or pressure it has and so the air moves toward areas of lower pressure.

We measure the wind or moving air by the effect it has on other things, such as the billowing sail of a boat, a wind turbine, a cooling breeze on a warm day, the bowing of grass in a field, the steady rhythm of our breathing, or as the powerful galeforce that knocks down trees.

Air is also an excellent medium of sound-waves and thus of language and communication. The call of **God** participates symbolically in this aspect of air.

The metaphor of Wind helps us understand our experience of **God**: unseen yet effective in our lives. The metaphor of air helps us understand our experience of **God** as life-breath, as inspiration, as enlivener, as a powerful presence we can't ignore or do without.

This element as Wind invites us to open our souls, open ourselves to a **God** whose presence flows in directions we cannot predict. This element as air invites us to a radical posture of surrender, for air, as with **God**, is a reality we cannot escape and must always rely upon it.

When we release our hold on our own plans and make ourselves available, **God** can stir us and blow us in the most life-giving directions.

Wind is also thought to be the most mobile of the elements. Air envelopes the whole earth, and wind circulates this air around the globe. As a moving, circulating, life giving atmosphere it reminds us that **God** is always and already present in every moment.

So let's get in touch with the element of wind/air this summer. Go sailing, blow bubbles, watch birds fly overhead, sit on your balcony or lie back and watch the clouds drift by, fly a kite or roll down the windows in your car.

Application for Today

Just as we are totally in the air and moved by the wind so we are in **God's Sustaining Presence** and moved by the **Winds** of the **Spirit** to amazing destinations.

Genesis 2:7

“God breathed life into the human, and the human started breathing, a living being.”

I got this from the Internet so we know it is true. On average, a person at rest takes about **16 breaths** per minute. This means we breathe about **960 breaths** an hour, **23,040 breaths** a day, and **8,409,600 breaths** a year. Now add exercise or excitement into the mix and the numbers go up. Persons who live to 80 will take at minimum about **672,768,000 breaths** in their lifetime.

While the generative gift of wind is present in the first creation story, the gift of air as life giving breath appears in the second creation story.

From the observation that we all return to the earth, and eventually become soil, the religious insight emerged that metaphorically **God** gathered earth, shaped and held it to create a human person. Then in an act of intimacy, **God** breathes life into the clay creature and humanity arose. This is how we understand that **God** is as close to us as our very breath. The Hebrew word for **Spirit** or Wind is **Ru’ah**, which also means breath of **God**.

We are the living intersection of creation and Creator. The breath of awareness transforms us and defines us as self-aware individuals. **Jesus** called this intimate, empowering embrace **Abba, Papa, Mama, God**.

When we recognize that the air, the sky begins at our feet, we realize that we actually live in the heavens now. In the space in which earth and sky meet **God’s** ‘heavenly’ presence is in the air we breathe.

So the old vertical theology which was very good at maintaining the separation between **God** and humanity is no longer helpful. The horizon; the line where heaven and ground touch, but moves when we approach it, is a

better metaphor to preserve **God's** unknowable sanctity and the distant wonder of the divine.

When we take the intimate divine breath seriously we no longer think 'up' instead, we consider **God** as profoundly within us and yet beyond the horizon, just beyond the place where sky meets the ground. The **Spirit** calls our gaze both inward as breath and outward, to lift our eyes to the edge.

The present spiritual revolution is the shift from a vertical **God** high and lifted up, above us, to a present **God** always and everywhere-with-us. Dirt and water are understandable and tangible icons of earthy sacredness but we need sky to remind us that no matter how close **God** is, **God** is still the One who hovers at the horizon.

When we maintain the connection that **God** is within, all around and just beyond us, inspiration or the breath of **God** is a gift available at any time.

So, whenever we feel uninspired; when we are just going through the motions, or avoiding what needs to be faced, or feel remote from others, the first thing we need to do is breathe deeply. Then allow ourselves to breathe into a breathing prayer.

With **God's** gift of life giving air we can imagine the **Spirit** breathing new life and love into those places where we have fallen asleep or have become deadened. As we breathe with **God we can begin to sense** life and love blowing and flowing into those remote or struggling relationships.

Now we are going to practice a Breathing Prayer.

Breathing Prayer: (practice this at home this summer)

As you breathe in, receive God's gift
of unending and expansive love for all of creation.
As you breathe out, 'exhale' love
to those for whom you care. **Repeat**

Now breathe in God's unending and expansive love for all of creation.
Breathe out love to family and friends...continue for **five** more
breaths.

For the next **5** breaths expand your circle of concern to include the people
with whom you have challenging relationships.
Breathe in God's unending and expansive love for all of creation.
Breathe out love
to those with whom you have challenging relationships.

For the next **5** breaths expand your circle of concern again
and breathe out love to your community.
Breathe in God's unending and expansive love for all of creation.
Breathe out love to your community.

For the next **5** breaths breathe out love to all peoples.
Breathe in God's unending and expansive love for all of creation.
Breathe out love to all peoples.

For the next **5** breaths breathe out love for all the creatures of the earth.
Breathe in God's unending and expansive love for all of creation.
Breathe out love for all the creatures of the earth.

(Notice what how you feel as you breathe/pray.)

Inspired by: Water, Wind, Earth and Fire: The Christian Practice of Praying
with the Elements, by Christine ValtersPaintner; Grounded: by Diana
Butler-Bass