

Pentecost (5June22)
John 14:8-17,25-27; Psalm 104;
Romans 8:14-17; Acts 2:1-21

There's definitely a notion among Lutherans that we don't really *do* the Holy Spirit.

One of our Confirmation students recently said they wanted to learn more because they don't really get what the Holy Spirit is. Maybe it is a little challenging to "get" the Holy Spirit. But does that mean we've been ignoring her?

Personally I'd say I'm into Jesus, that he's what my faith can hold onto, and that if we go too long without mentioning him we've missed the point of being church at all.

But it already gets complicated since a focus on Jesus isn't actually neglecting the Holy Spirit. Jesus himself says today that if we've seen him, we've seen God the Father. And the Holy Spirit will be another who comes in Jesus' name, meaning bearing his presence, making him known. That's getting ahead of things with Trinity Sunday next week, of one in three and three and one, and being the same-only-different.

So let's back it up for some Holy Spirit basics. For a theology basic, I'd say that we can't neglect the Holy Spirit, since none of this—actually truly none of it—is possible without her.

To translate that theology basic into a biology basic, I invite you to breathe in. And again, breathe in. Once more. Do you feel better? Do you feel holier? You just got Spirited. That's the Holy Spirit's work. As you breathed in, you were in-spirited or in-spired. And as you kept doing it, it was respiration; you are being constantly re-spirited, the Holy Spirit doing her life-sustaining work, without you hardly even noticing! Again, let's breathe in.

This was in Psalm 104 that we read: "When you give them your breath, life is created, and you renew the face of the earth." The word "breath" here is also the word for Spirit; in neither Hebrew nor Greek is there distinction, and most other translations would say "when you send your Spirit" instead of breath.

The overlap is the point: your breath is from the Spirit. And in this marvelous Psalm, this is creation-wide. It's certainly not just Christians who have the Spirit, much less a special kind or level of Christians. It's not even only humans. Everything with the breath of life is clearly and constantly being sustained by the Spirit. Psalm 104 lists birds like the stork, wild donkeys and mountain goats and cattle (so neither wild nor domestic has preferential treatment), lions and—wait for it you Wisconsin fans dressed in red—also badgers!

And even without scientific knowledge of chlorophyll or gills or carbon dioxide cycles, that one large tree co-creates enough oxygen for four people, still the Psalm knows that grass and grapes and grain and cedars breathe the Spirit, and knows the Spirit can work breathing underwater and is with all the swarms and schools of what the Psalm knew—again, even without scientific research—to be the most biodiverse part of the planet. And, whether we count it as mythological or not, it even includes sea monsters.

So this renewing work of the Holy Spirit should be apparent to us, since there's no place she's not active, as active and present as every breath, renewing the face of the earth, even moment by moment. It's vital enough, let's breathe again.

It's so important that we could stop there. But, of course, this Holy Spirit on the loose won't stop there, and she keeps up her work.

Perhaps if we've already seen that the Holy Spirit sustains you and all life, renewing you breath by breath, we can next see that she also sustains all relationships. In some views, she is described as the bond of love, even the bond between God the Father and God the Son (again falling into Trinitarian theology).

Romans today proclaims that she is the bond of love in your relationship with God, tying you to Jesus (which is the typical thing we understand about her, and the focus of her work in Word and Sacrament and so on). Again, as Romans says, she fosters your adoption, to be chosen and claimed as a child of God, to know that you are beloved and part of this family.

And you probably have to consider it an extended family, since even in this small community we're not all the same, not heterogeneous, but have different ages and backgrounds and stories and likes and dislikes.

But then the family extends, which maybe we see stretching around the world and through history.

With the work of being part of a family, we can also be thankful that the work of the Holy Spirit isn't just in the happy feelings of love and creative inspiration, but that she is also responsible for the work of forgiveness and reconciliation. We know that can be a challenge in our relationships, so even while we sing Halleluahs to our last breath, praising in gratitude that we have been reconciled to God, we likely plead "Come, Holy Spirit" so that we may be given grace in our other relationships, some of those with whom we're close—in actual family or this church family—and those who are very far, and we'd count even as enemies. "Come, Holy Spirit! We need you!"

That may illustrate the peculiar 3rd part of the Apostles' Creed. Where it says "I believe in God the Father" and describes that as "Creator of heaven and earth," and goes into a fair amount of detail about Jesus, it may seem it just says "I believe in the Holy Spirit" and then moves on to a random other list.

But you may also recognize it centers on the relationships of church community (although I don't think it could imagine to limit the Holy Spirit only to church relationships) and it recognizes that these require the forgiveness of sins.

And then the creed sees the work of the Holy Spirit moving to the future. Jesus says we can anticipate it. Peter picks up on the prophet Joel to say that the old will see visions and the young dream dreams and it's for all genders and all flesh. And the creed looks to the resurrection of the dead and the life everlasting, a newly created new breath.

It's long-term future expectations from this enormous, behind the scenes yet so-big-it's-almost-easy-to-overlook, mysterious but obvious work of the Holy Spirit, painted in a very broad

image. And there's still more we could tease out and say.

But for now, I'll conclude gratefully with a phrase from Luther's Small Catechism, in some way a summary of what we might say about the Holy Spirit. Luther began by saying "I cannot by my own understanding or effort..." None of it is possible without her. So let's give thanks for the Holy Spirit, with a sigh of relief and breath of renewal.