Sermon – "A Breath of Fresh Air"
Pentecost Sunday, June 8, 2025
Scripture Reading: Acts 2:1-8, 12-18
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Our scripture reading is Acts 2:1-8, 12-18. This is Luke's account of what took place at the Pentecost festival fifty days following the Passover, which marked the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Those gathered hear the words of the disciples in their own dialect and experience a breath of fresh air==God's presence in a life changing way. Listen for the word of God.

When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. 2 And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. 3 Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. 4 All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.5 Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. 6 And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each. Amazed and astonished, they asked, "Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? 8 And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language?

Members of the congregation speak vs. 17-18 in the languages.

- *Ben Arnold (Bahasa Indonesia)*
- *Sophia Choi (Korean)*
- *Mervice Alah Abung (French)*
- *James Maeda (Japanese)*

12 All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, "What does this mean?" 13 But others sneered and said, "They are filled with new wine."

14 But Peter, standing with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed them, "Men of Judea and all who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and listen to what I say. 15 Indeed, these are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only nine o'clock in the morning. 16 No, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel:

17 'In the last days it will be, God declares,
that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh,
and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,
and your young men shall see visions,
and your old men shall dream dreams.
18 Even upon my slaves, both men and women,
in those days I will pour out my Spirit;
and they shall prophesy. Amen.

The word of the Lord.
Thanks be to God.

The title of the meditation: "A Breath of Fresh Air"

Text: In the last days it will be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh,
Acts 2:17a

Let us pray: Holy and loving God, thank you for your life-giving spirit who brings us together on this Pentecost Sunday… breathing a breath of fresh air into our lives. And now, may the words of my mouth and the meditations of each of our hearts be acceptable to you. Amen.

A breath of fresh air blew through a group of Galileans gathered in Jerusalem for a Jewish festival, fifty days after Easter morning. As the Galilean disciples shared the story of Jesus of Nazareth, their words were understood by each in their native tongue. People actually heard one another. They knew as they watched the tongues of fire, even as Moses knew when he stood before the burning bush, that they were on Holy Ground, that God was in their midst creating something new, refreshing, and life giving.

"How could this be?" some asked with amazement. The miracle of God's spirit coming on Pentecost is the miracle of people understanding one another, moving beyond their own dialect or point of view. The refreshing part of the breath that breathed life into Christ's church was not the tongues of fire, per say, but the miracle of people listening to and respecting one another. This breath of fresh air would create something new, spontaneous and tender in the "People of the Way:" a community of believers from different cultures and races coming together to share leadership and resources for the good of all. Scattering worn out biases and prejudices with a breath of fresh air.

The uplifting spirit of Pentecost is the spirit that has been at work since the beginning of time—the Hebrew *ruah* which *swept over the face of the waters* creating the world. God's spirit is the power that gives order to the universe and gives life and breath to us. This spirit is the same *breath* that Yahweh breathed into Adam and Eve, giving them life. *Breath* is essential for life. Our living and our breathing are one and the same.

When Breath Becomes Air was a #1 New York Times Bestseller which our son Paul gave to his dad a few years ago on Father's Day. It is the memoir of Dr. Paul Kalanithi, who at the age of 36 on the verge of completing a decade of training as a neurosurgeon is diagnosed with stage IV lung cancer. Dr. Kalanithi spent his life exploring the science of how life, the mind, and the soul work. However, in this refreshing and beautifully written memoir as he faces his own mortality, he becomes more curious about the meaning of life, the mind, and the soul.

Dr. Kalanithi, in looking for meaning within his very accomplished life as a neuroscientist, returned to the central values of Christianity—sacrifice, redemption, and forgiveness, because, as he shares, he found them so compelling.

When Breath Becomes Air reminds us that although we cannot control the matter or timing of our death, we can choose how we approach it. The refreshing wind that blew through the synagogue on that first Pentecost and which continues to blow within each of our lives today provides resilience and a reservoir of strength for the unexpected turns and challenges along the way of our life journeys. When we hoist our spirit-sails and catch the invisible gust of God's spirit, we have the power we need to sail gracefully across the water of life with the consistent and reliable wind of God's spirit.

James Michener, in his novel Chesapeake, compares the human spirit with a ship's journey at sea.

A ship, like a human being, moves best when it is slightly athwart to the wind, when it has to keep its sails tight and attend its course. Ships, like people, do poorly when the wind is directly behind, pushing them sloppily on their way so that no care is required in steering or in the management of sails; the wind seems favorable, but it induces relaxation in tension and skill. What is needed is a wind slightly opposed to the ship, for then tension can be maintained, and juices can flow, and ideas can germinate, for ships, like people, respond to challenge.

The spirit of God challenges us to live in the tension of affirming both faith and science. The recent trend within our government of gutting research and advancements in science and medicine is both regressive and dangerous. Affirming Dr. Kalanithi's return to faith on his journey home does not negate the beauty and grace in the art of neurosurgery which he mastered during his days among us, heroically completing his residency shortly before meeting his Maker.

Likewise, the initiative to eliminate diversity, equity, and inclusion within our society is the antithesis of the meaning of Pentecost. God's spirit challenges and empowers us to get beyond our own dialect, national origin, and point of view, and to embrace diversity, equity, and inclusion. The spirit of God challenges us to reach beyond ourselves, to live a simple song of service and praise, and to lift our eyes to the hills from whence comes our help.

Summertime is a season of refreshment, and it is also a season of serving others. With the healthy tension on our sails, let us work together, refreshed by God's breath of fresh air, and nourished at God's table of grace and acceptance. Amen.