

Pentecost celebrates the outpouring of God's Spirit in the event narrated by Acts 2. Where the name comes from is simple enough. "Pente-" recalls the church's tradition that this event took place on the fiftieth day of Easter. When we turn to "Spirit," things get more complex. One might think that differences between Greek and Hebrew religious views would result in their respective words for "spirit" having quite diverse meanings. But curiously, *ruah* in Hebrew and *pneuma* in Greek are surprisingly alike. Both are used and translated interchangeably as *wind* and *breath* as well as *spirit*. So how does this inform the gift and Presence we celebrate this coming Sunday? How do those varied meanings come into play in our understanding and experience of Spirit?

Spirit as Wind. At first glance, this might seem a mere detail in Acts 2 when Spirit creates the Church: "There came a sound like the rush of a violent wind (*pneuma*)." But wind and creative acts have a much longer history. "Darkness covered the face of the Deep, while a wind (*ruah*) from God swept over the waters (Gen. 1:2). In yet another act of creation, God's *ruah* parts the sea so that the Hebrew people could find freedom from Egypt (Exodus 14:21). Spirit as *wind* embodies the power of God set loose in creative ways. Unseen itself, but clearly seen in effect.

Spirit as Breath. John 20 offers an alternative Pentecost. It takes place, not 50 days after Easter but the very night of Easter. "Jesus breathed on (the disciples) and said to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit.'" Spirit comes here, not in the rush of a mighty wind but in life-giving breath. Spirit and breath are an ancient pairing. In the Genesis 2 account of creation, God breathes life into the one made of dust (*adamah*). In Psalm 104, the same confession is made: "When you send forth your *ruah* (breath/spirit), they are created." **We** are created by God's breath.

Spirit and Community. As revealed in the Hebrew Exodus and the Church's Birthing, Spirit and community go hand in hand. 1 Corinthians 12 builds on that theme. For Paul, all the gifts listed find their origin and purpose in upbuilding the Church. From Genesis and Exodus onward to Acts and beyond, Spirit's breath and wind blow for the sake of the whole, whether that be the whole of community or the whole of creation. That is our hope and challenge. Jesus once taught Nicodemus: "The wind blows where it wills . . ." (John 3:8). And yes: "wind" is the same word as "Spirit." God is free to move where and among whom God wills, whether we are ready or not. To go with this God is to ride on the wings of the wind, and breathe in the new life God brings.

For Reflection and Action:

What are the understandings, and questions, you bring to Pentecost and Spirit?

Where do you see the signs of Spirit as breath; as wind; as God's freedom?