

“When you send forth your spirit, they are created...”
Reading from the New Testament: Acts 2:1-11
Reading from the Old Testament: Psalm 104:24-34

Did you know that you have a complex HVAC system in your schnoz, more advanced and reliable than anything Morris Jenkins and his singing technicians can put together? *There'll be warm heat in your lungs, tonight!* Your nose has these small bone-like shelves called turbinates that project from the lateral wall of your nose. Turbinates are lined with lots of blood vessels, the heat from which warms the air passing by to body temperature. That's right, you have a turbo powered heater in your nose. These turbinates are also lined with goblet cells that secrete mucus, and these help to humidify air as it passes by. Inhaled particles and microbes are trapped in the sticky mucus and moved to the back of your throat by what they call the 'escalator' to be swallowed, where gastric juices destroy them, while also giving you the sensation of eating oysters without the calories or expense.

I read that each pair of lungs contains close to 1500 miles of airways and in the neighborhood of 300 million to 500 millions tiny air sacs that facilitate the exchange of oxygen and carbon dioxide between the lungs and the blood system. A red blood cell contains about 250 million hemoglobin molecules, which carry oxygen through the blood. Each hemoglobin

molecule can carry four oxygen molecules. The adult body carries approximately 25 trillion red blood cells. Are you keeping up with me? That's 25 trillion red blood cells each carrying 250 million hemoglobin molecules each carrying 4 oxygen molecules. Add it all up and we fly by billions, trillions, quadrillions, quintillions, and land on the number of 250 sextillion. That's a number with 22 zeros! So, you have quite a crowd laboring in your chest, with everyone working 24/7 to keep your yoga instructor happy — *Breathe in. Breathe out.* 250 sextillion! Jerry Lee Lewis wasn't joking when waxing lyrical on the human body: *There's a whole lotta shakin' going on!*

In the classic rom-com, *Sleepless in Seattle*, the Tom Hanks character shares his basic coping discipline following his wife's death, "Well, I'm going to get out of bed every morning, breathe in and out all day long; and then after a while I won't have to remind myself to get out of bed in the morning and breathe in and out." Truth is, even in the dark valley where the blue moods of grief seem to swallow you whole, you do not have to remind yourself to breathe in and out. Unless disrupted by bodily trauma, disease, or a failing heart, those sextillions of Amazon vehicles in your respiratory system are going to keep delivering product on their appointed rounds.

Some will cough up (no pun intended) a million dollars to say they have a Ferrari without pausing to consider that in the mirror each morning they see a walking, breathing engineering marvel that renders their Italian supercar no more marvelous than the lump in your mashed potatoes.

The revered Buddhist teacher, Thich Nhat Hanh, suggested that “Breath is the bridge which connects life to consciousness, which unites your body to your thoughts.” How often do you pause to consider what a wonder life is, each breath fueling a heart that beats, a brain that ponders and plans, feet that carry you forth toward adventure, eyes that see the beauty of a fading sun reflecting off the random clouds floating along the horizon of a Howard Johnson sky, ears that capture the soul-stirring harmonies of a Rutter anthem, fingers that feel the glory of God when brushed along an infant’s cheek?

We breathe in and breathe out. It’s about the clearest sign of life. When with a dying loved one, our eyes are unavoidably drawn first, not to the face, but to the chest, searching for the rising and falling that announces they are still with us. Even in such surreal moments where the nearness of death is evident, I remain in awe of these amazing machines that work as

well as they do for Then as long as they do. In Genesis 2 it reads, “Then the Lord God formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being.” It is an act of animation beyond Disney’s wildest dreams.

Where there is breath, there is life. As such, breath offers us a glimpse into the continuing work of the Creator. The psalmist observes: “When you send forth your breath, they are created.” The Hebrew word is *ruach* and the Greek word is *pneuma*, and in each case the word encompasses the same three concepts: breath; wind; and spirit. The breath that sustains us. The wind that warms and cools us and fills our sails to carry us forward. The Spirit who awakens us to the presence of God and each other. Each sense of the word *ruach/pneuma* grants us an idea of the Creator’s active and ongoing care for and presence with what the Creator has made.

Psalm 104 is a celebration of God’s creation, and our portion of the psalm for today rejoices in the breath of life at work in the great diversity of God’s creatures. “In wisdom you have made them all; the earth is full of your creatures. Yonder is the sea, great and wide, creeping things innumerable are there, living things both small and great.”

Have you ever seen a sea angel before? Granted, when you step out onto your front sidewalk in the morning and see a slug ponderously slithering across the concrete, the beatific wonder of God's mesmerizing creation will not overwhelm you. Yet, the slug's seafaring cousin gracefully swimming through the ocean deep will captivate you. From the water's surface to a depth of 2000 feet the beguiling sea angel can be seen swimming through the ocean enchanting anyone who catches sight of one.

There is an ethereal quality to their small translucent, gelatinous bodies which give off a bluish glow. Because of their translucence, their internal organs are visible, and even those seem a work of art with their golden gleam. To top it off, their gossamer fins have the appearance of angel wings and make their movements seem more like flying than swimming. It's a slug! But, its appearance seems a testament to the glory of God, a swimming, graceful, glowing hymn of praise. "Yonder is the sea, great and wide, creeping things innumerable are there, living things both small and great ... These all look to you to give them their food in due season; when you give to them, they gather it up; when you open your hand, they are filled with good things. When you hide your face, they are dismayed; when

you take away their breath, they die and return to their dust. When you send forth your spirit, they are created.”

When you send forth your spirit, your breath, they are created. The same breath that animates your body and enlivens your conscience feeds the heart of the sea angel with oxygenated blood, which in turn circulates through its body, allowing it to maintain that beguiling glow of life.

When you send forth your spirit, your breath, they are created. What is notable in the psalm is the egalitarian nature of this breath of God. Humans are not lifted above the other living things but simply live among them as one interconnected whole. The Confession of 1967 states: “In its beauty and vastness, sublimity and awfulness, order and disorder, the world reflects to the eye of faith the majesty and mystery of its Creator.” A Declaration of Faith proposes: “God made human beings along with all the other creatures and charged them to care for the earth and all that lives on it. We acknowledge we share in the interdependence that binds together all God's creation.”

We are part of a whole and God's concern and care extends to its entirety. The earth and its creatures are not ours to thoughtlessly abuse. We

are part of this whole and are charged to be stewards of all to which God has given life. We know better and we live better when we can cast aside our illusions of and our efforts to control, and thus live into the idea that we are one part of something far greater than ourselves. To understand that we share the same oxygen with the bird at the feeder, the Buddhist at prayer, the soldier in harm's way, or the gazelles racing across the Serengeti is to perceive something of the breadth of the Creator's attention span and the universality of God's concern. We know better and live better when we grasp that our network of relationships extends far beyond the names on our contact list and into realms we seldom consider. The bees need the flowers; you need the bees. The trees need your carbon dioxide; You need their oxygen.

I pulled out a book this week in search of an image, but was stopped by a blank page on which I had written some random thought that came to me; from where I do not know. I was struck by what I had written. "A dog's eyes can make your heart melt just as her behavior can make your ears steam." I wasn't so much struck by the truth of it, but by the fact that the same could be said about a child, a parent, a spouse, the neighborhood cat, or your random suburban deer. Pentecost isn't just about God's Spirit in you

or God's Spirit in me. At Pentecost we celebrate a Spirit far grander and more active than we can comprehend, infusing, animating, and mysteriously sustaining the whole ongoing enterprise of Creation. God cares for all of it. We are related and our lives are enriched and there is healing in all Creation when we pay attention to that. The earth is telling us that we have been ignoring it far too long.

The noted author Annie Dillard seemed to perceive this when accidentally happening upon a mockingbird one day. She said, "The mockingbird took a single step into the air and dropped. His wings were still folded against his sides as though he were singing from a limb and not falling, accelerating thirty-two feet per second per second, through empty air. Just a breath before he would have been dashed to the ground, he unfurled his wings with exact, deliberate care, revealing the broad bars of white, spread his elegant, white-banded tail, and so floated onto the grass. I had just rounded a corner when his insouciant step caught my eye; there was no one else in sight. The fact of his free fall was like the old philosophical conundrum about the tree that falls in the forest. The answer must be, I think, that beauty and grace are performed whether or not we

will or sense them. The least we can do is try to be there.” (Annie Dillard, *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*)

We are related and the sooner we can acknowledge that, the sooner we can join in the work of God’s Spirit, bringing healing care to God’s good creation. Amen.