**Names for God: Wind, Fire, Spirit**

**Pentecost Taize Service**

**Prepared by Co-Pastor Susanne Guenther Loewen**

**June 9, 2019**

**Introduction to Taize Service – Lighting the Peace Lamp**

Our worship service this morning takes the form of a Taize service, based on the meditative services of the ecumenical monastery in Taize, France. Through Scripture, prayer, readings, and simple, repetitive songs, we are invited into a spirit of meditation, a time of reflection and openness to the presence and Spirit of God.

 Today is Pentecost, and so we light the peace lamp today as we name God as our Scripture for today names the Divine: as Wind, Fire, and Holy Spirit. May this flame remind us of the power of these names for God, who comes to give us peace which surpasses understanding.

**Scripture Reading** – Acts 2:1-6

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**Readings: Wind**

**Susanne:** Genesis 1:1-2 (NRSV):

In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters.

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In Hebrew, the *ruach Elohim* – that is, the wind-breath of the Divine – hovers over the face of the deep. This is the same wind-breath that will breathe life into the first human in the next chapter of Genesis. And this is no coincidence, for the wind-breath (*ruach*) is a feminine noun, and shares its root with the Hebrew word for womb (*rechem*), representing the life-giving power of mothering. And then there is *racham*, meaning, to show compassion, as in the God of Israel who abounds in steadfast love. *Ruach – rechem – racham*: together, these reveal to us a mothering God, hovering over us in her life-giving power and compassionate love – as she did at the beginning of creation.

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**Patrick:** “Jesus tells Nicodemus the Spirit is like a womb. To see the kingdom of God you need brand-new eyes. You must be born again.

 Nicodemus doesn’t understand.

 Jesus says the Spirit is like water. To see God’s work, you must be washed, renewed, reborn.

 Still Nicodemus scratches his head.

 Jesus says the Spirit is like wind. Employing a bit of wordplay, he uses the Greek word *pneuma* – which means both Spirit and wind – and says the windy Spirit blows wherever it pleases. You can hear the windy Spirit, Jesus says, and you can even see its effects. But you don’t know where it has come from and you don’t get to tell it where to go. The windy Spirit just shows up. The same is true for people who have been reborn, for people who see the world with brand-new eyes. It’s not because of their parents, or because of their status, or because of something they did, something they achieved. There’s nothing on the outside, nothing physical that sets them apart. The windy Spirit just shows up and changes everything. …

 This is what’s most annoying and beautiful about the windy Spirit and why we so often miss it. It has this habit of showing up in all the wrong places and among all the wrong people, defying our categories and refusing to take direction. Nicodemus struggled to see the Spirit outside the religious institution. Today, some of us struggle to see the Spirit within the religious institution, often for good reason. But God is present both inside and outside the traditional church, working all sorts of everyday miracles to inspire and change us if only we *pay attention*.” – Rachel Held Evans[[1]](#footnote-1)

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### Susanne:

### [Breath of Spring Congregational Prayer](https://carolpenner.typepad.com/leadinginworship/2017/05/breath-of-spring-congregational-prayer.html)[[2]](#footnote-2) - Carol Penner

We listen this morning to the sound of our own breath,
and the breathing of those around us. [pause for 30 seconds]
Thank you God for breath,
for life flowing in and out of each of us.
It is wonderful to be alive—thank you for life!
Thank you for the sweet scent of the breath of spring;
for blossoms--apricot, cherry, peach,
for daffodils and sweet hyacinths,
for the good earth, turned over and ready for seed,
for the strong sun and its power.
Thank you that you are a God who hears our breath.
You hear our slow steady breaths as we’ve slept,
the panting of children as they run and play,
the deep breaths of hard work and manual labour,
our slow sighs when we are weary or filled with grief.
You hear our first little baby breath,
you are the one who hears and knows our final breath.
Your Spirit moves over the earth, enlivening us all.
Help us to exhale hatred, and inhale your love
Help us to exhale greed, and inhale your generosity.
Help us to exhale despair, and inhale your hope.
Breathe life into peacemakers,
in the conflicts in our own town and country,
where class and race and ideology divide us.
Breathe life into peacemakers in Palestine, Colombia, and Yemen,

where war has ruled so long.
Breathe inspiration into our government leaders and diplomats,
helping them work for peaceful solutions.
Forgive us when we are not outraged by war and violence,
and instead are numb to every new story of destruction.
On this most beautiful of days,
with your Spirit blowing over this land,
thank you for giving us this chance
to be part of your breathtaking work,
humble servants in the service of Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen

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**Song -** HWB 298 – Veni Sancte Spiritus (Come, Holy Spirit)

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**Readings: Fire**

**Patrick:** *A Prayer for Readers of the Old Testament*

Perhaps you do not know how much

you need God

to come as a woman in labour,

a birthing spirit hovering over creation,

holding within her the memory of you

nursing at her breast.

Or to surprise you in ordinary places,

searching in the fields for sheep,

uprooting his garden,

keeping her bees,

a bird roosting in a tree.

If you look closely as you walk,

if you pay attention

with your eye on the book and world,

the blessing will be

as near as dirt, as close as air –

a sprouting tree,

a rushing fountain.

And if you rage or fear, if tears are your bread

God is there in the middle of it –

a steaming pot,

a raging she-bear,

a smoking kiln

or perhaps fire.

Always fire.[[3]](#footnote-3)

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**Susanne:** “The Spirit is like fire, deceptively polite in its dance atop the wax and wick of our church candles, but wild and mercurial as a storm when unleashed. Fire holds no single shape, no single form. It can roar through a forest or fulminate in a cannon. It can glow in hot coals or flit about in embers. But it cannot be held. The living know it indirectly through heat, through light, through tendrils of smoke snaking through the sky, through the scent of burning wood, through the itch of ash in the eye. Fire consumes. It creates in its destroying and destroys in its creating. …When God led [God’s] people through the wilderness, the Spirit blazed in a fire that rested over the tabernacle each night. And when God made the church, the Spirit blazed in little fires that rested over [God’s] people’s heads. ‘Quench not the Spirit,’ the apostle [Paul] wrote. It is as necessary and as dangerous as fire, so stay alert; *pay attention*.” – Rachel Held Evans[[4]](#footnote-4)

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**Patrick:** Exodus 19:16-20 (NRSV):

“16On the morning of the third day there was thunder and lightning, as well as a thick cloud on the mountain, and a blast of a trumpet so loud that all the people who were in the camp trembled. 17Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet God. They took their stand at the foot of the mountain. 18Now Mount Sinai was wrapped in smoke, because the Lord had descended upon it in fire; the smoke went up like the smoke of a kiln, while the whole mountain shook violently. 19As the blast of the trumpet grew louder and louder, Moses would speak and God would answer him in thunder. 20When the Lord descended upon Mount Sinai, to the top of the mountain, the Lord summoned Moses to the top of the mountain, and Moses went up.”

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**Susanne:** “I, the highest and fiery power, have kindled every living spark and I have breathed out nothing that can die. . . . I flame above the beauty of the fields; I shine in the waters; in the sun, the moon, and the stars, I burn. And by means of the airy wind, I stir everything into quickness with a certain invisible life which sustains all. . . . I, the fiery power, lie hidden in these things and they blaze from me.” – Hildegaard of Bingen[[5]](#footnote-5)

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**Song –** bulletin insert -Taize songbook 29 – Nothing Can Trouble (1st time: Spanish)

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**Readings: Spirit**

**Patrick:** “The point for our pondering is that speaking about the Spirit signifies the presence of the living God active in this historical world. The Spirit is God who actually arrives in every moment, God drawing near and passing by in vivifying power in the midst of historical struggle. So profoundly is this the case that whenever people speak in a generic way of “God,” of their experience of God or of God’s doing something in the world, more often than not they are referring to the Spirit, if a triune prism be introduced.

 “Of all the activities that theology attributes to the Spirit, the most significant is this: the Spirit is the creative origin of all life. In the words of the Nicene Creed, the Spirit is *vivificantem*, vivifier or life-giver. This designation refers to creation not just at the beginning of time, but continuously: the Spirit is the unceasing, dynamic flow of divine power that sustains the universe, bringing forth life….

 “…as the continuous, creative origin of life the Creator Spirit is immanent in the historical world: ‘Where can I go from your presence,’ sings the psalmist, ‘and from your Spirit where can I flee?’ The Spirit is in the highest sky, the deepest hole, the darkest night, farther east than the sunrise, over every next horizon (Ps. 139:7-12). The Spirit fills the world and is in all things.”

– Elizabeth Johnson[[6]](#footnote-6)

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**Susanne:**

John 14:15-21 (NRSV):

“If you love me, you will keep my commandments. 16And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever. 17This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you.

18“I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you. 19In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me; because I live, you also will live. 20On that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you. 21They who have my commandments and keep them are those who love me; and those who love me will be loved by my Father, and I will love them and reveal myself to them.”

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**Patrick:** “The Spirit is like a bird, fragile alloy of heaven and earth, where wind and feather and flight meet breath and blood and bones. The rabbis imagined her as a pigeon, the Celts a wild goose. Like a dove, she glided over the primordial waters, hovered above Mary’s womb, and descended onto Jesus’ dripping wet head. She protected Israel like an eagle, and like a hen, brooded over her chicks. ‘Hide me in the shadow of your winds,’ the poet king wrote. ‘Because you are my help, I sing in the shadow of your wings’ (Psalm 17:8, 63:7). The Spirit is as common as a cooing pigeon and transcendent as a high-flying eagle. So look up and sing back, catch the light of God in a diaphanous scrim of wing. *Pay attention*.” – Rachel Held Evans[[7]](#footnote-7)

1. RHE, Searching for Sunday: 196-197. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. https://carolpenner.typepad.com/leadinginworship/2017/05/breath-of-spring-congregational-prayer.html [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Melissa Florer-Bixler, *Fire By Night*, 11. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Rachel Held Evans, *Searching for Sunday*, 162. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Quoted in: Elizabeth A. Johnson, *She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse* (New York: Crossroad, 1992), 124. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Elizabeth A. Johnson, [Women, Earth, and Creator Spirit](https://www.spiritualityandpractice.com/books/books.php?id=7770)*: 1993 Madeleva Lecture in Spirituality* (New York: Paulist Press, 1993), 41-2, [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Held Evans, *Searching for Sunday*, 163. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)