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Title: A Memorial Forever

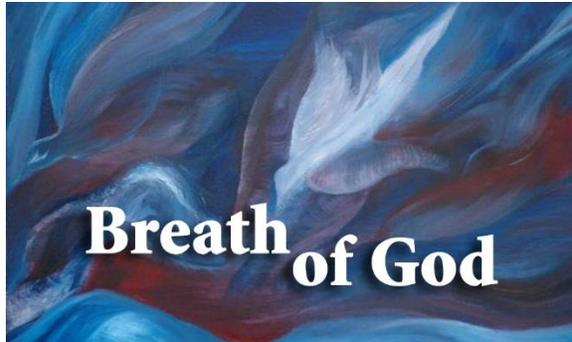
Date: June 3-4, 2017

Preaching: Senior Minister Randy Spleth

Scripture: [John 20:19-23](#)

Text: [Acts 2:1-21](#)

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A former member of our congregation loves sending me electronic greeting cards. She doesn't just send them to me. There is an undisclosed list of recipients. Some of you may be getting them. They are clever, animated cards that are always worth looking at a couple of

times. She sends them for almost every holiday. Thanksgiving, Christmas and New Year's. MLK, Valentine's Day, St. Patrick's Day, April Fool's Day and Easter. This past month, I got a Cinco de Mayo card and a Memorial Day Card. She has been sending me these cards for years but there is one card that she has never sent me, a Pentecost card. Today is Pentecost and I didn't get one in my inbox.

I've never even seen a Pentecost card. It's not that I haven't looked. I went to Cynthia's Hallmark Store on 96th St this week. I needed to get some graduation cards so I thought I'd look again. It is remarkable to me the wide variety of cards that store has. They are really geared up for Father's Day and Graduation right now--row after row of cards. Wedding and anniversary cards are big too along with birthday cards. They have every birthday card you can imagine. There was one rack of cards that had a variety of themes such as retirement and thank you cards. They even had a card for potty training and I thought, "Wow, the kid could read the card while sitting on the..." Then I thought, that's either a really smart toddler or a really, really delayed child.

They have a big section of religious cards and I thought, this time, I'll find a Pentecost card. I found lots of first communion and baptism cards, even cards for ordinations. There was a small section of Pastor Appreciation cards. I'd actually received several of them this past week, people sending me notes about my sabbatical. I leave tomorrow and won't be back in this pulpit until the second weekend of September. It's has been very nice to receive your good wishes

although I should be sending each of you a thank you card for the gift of the time for study and renewal. Thank you.

There is a nice Jewish section with cards for Bar and Bat Mitzvah, Rosh Hashanah which is a ways off in September. But there was no Shavout cards which is the Jewish Pentecost and began on May 30th and ended on June 1. Shavout, or the Feast of Weeks is seven weeks after Passover. It celebrates the giving of the Torah. The disciples were in Jerusalem for the Feast of Weeks when the Holy Spirit descended on them. But I was at the store on June 1 so, maybe those cards were sold out.

Finally, a clerk noticed that I was spending an inordinate amount of time in front of the religious card section. As she walked up, she looked familiar. "Can I help you sir?" "Yes, I'm looking for a Pentecost card. Do you have one?" She gave me this roll of the eyes and said, "You've been here before. You are that pastor from down the street. I told you last time that we have Christmas and Easter cards. But no Pentecost cards. We can't help you." Then, as she was walking off, she turned around and with a smirk said, "Why don't you come back at Halloween?" There will be lots of ghost cards then.

Maybe she's on to something. Maybe that's why there are no Pentecost cards. Christmas is big with cards and presents. Easter is big with cards and brunch. But Pentecost comes and goes without notice. No cards, no presents, no special meals. It's the birthday of the church and the celebration of the Holy Spirit. We should have a big party and send cards. But we don't. Maybe it is because a lot of people are nervous about the Spirit and some even think it is scary. "Come back at Halloween. There will be lots of ghost cards then."

When she said that, I knew which version of the Bible she preferred. Or at least, I knew about how old she was. When I was a child, people talked about the Holy Ghost instead of the Holy Spirit. There is a reason. The old King James Version Bible translated the word "spirit" all but seven times, as "ghost". Modern Bible translations use the term Holy Spirit. The King James Version actually uses the phrase Holy Ghost 90 times. For instance, the Pentecost story reads this way in the King James Version. "And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance." (Acts 2:4, KJV) Now that's scary to me, being filled by a ghost.

The word "ghost" meant something very different to the KJV translators. In 1611, when the King James Version was originally translated from Latin, the word "ghost" didn't mean a scary apparition. It wasn't intended to describe the deceased. In Shakespeare's time, the time of the King James translation, a ghost was the living essence of a person. The word "spirit" described a deceased person that was wailing in the night or haunting your attic. As the English language evolved, people started saying "ghost" when speaking of the vision of a dead person and began to use "spirit" to describe the living essence of life. So in a way, the two words switched meanings.

You can see this switch of meanings in another passage from the King James Bible. Do you remember when Jesus startles the disciples by walking on water, late one night, walking to their boat out in the middle of the Sea of Galilee? Our modern version reads, "But when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were terrified, saying, 'It is a **ghost!**' And they cried out in fear'" (Matthew 14:26, NRSV) The King James Version reads "And when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were troubled, saying, 'It is a **spirit**; and they cried out for fear.'" (Matthew 14:26, KJV) The meanings of words can change. Spirit becomes Ghost, Ghost becomes Spirit. In modern translations, Holy Ghost is now Holy Spirit. Still, this doesn't seem to be a good enough reason to call the Pentecost party off. Why do we say, "We had a lavish Christmas, a fine Easter--we don't need to do anything for Pentecost." That is what we say in the way we act.

Maybe it is because the Spirit's nature is inanimate which causes us to be a little unsure about the Holy Spirit is. We can hang a picture on the wall of Jesus. Michelangelo painted a picture of God at the moment of creation. We can imagine God sitting up on a throne somewhere, looking exactly like a Renaissance marble statue. But we can't see the Holy Spirit. Even Luke had difficulty describing the Holy Spirit in Acts. Did you catch that? In the Book of Acts, Luke describes the Holy Spirit this way: "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. Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them." (Acts 2:2-3) Was it wind or did it just sound like wind? Was it fire, or did it just appear to be fire?" It sounds something like the way people describe the traumatic experience of a tornado. "The wind sounded like a train coming through the house." Something hard to describe is hard to experience or to even know if you want to experience it.

How appealing is that to you? Wind blowing you around while fire is dancing on top of your head—is it something you want? Add to this the description of the outside observers, "They're drunk on cheap wine." (Acts 2:13, The Message) Okay, now maybe we can see why Hallmark doesn't have Pentecost cards. Who would send a card to a drunk going through a natural disaster?

Someone who struggles with the concept of the Holy Spirit passed along a newspaper report from heaven. Written like something you'd see in the Indianapolis Star, it reads:

HEAVEN—Calling the Holy Trinity "overstaffed and over budget," God announced plans Monday to downsize the group by slowly phasing out the Holy Ghost. "Given the poor economic climate and the unclear nature of the Holy Ghost's duties, I felt this was a sensible and necessary decision," God said. "The Holy Ghost will be given fewer and fewer responsibilities until His formal resignation from Trinity duty following Easter services on April 20. Thereafter, the Father and the Son shall be referred to as the Holy Duo."¹

Have we phased out the Holy Spirit? I hope not because not only do we need the Holy Spirit, it was offered to us as a gift by Jesus. Everyone knows it is wrong to refuse a gift. In the Gospel of John, Jesus promised the gift of the Spirit. At his Last Supper, Jesus said that he will have God "...give you another Advocate, to be with you forever. This is the Spirit of truth.... he abides with you, and he will be in you. (John 14:16a-17)

Later, John describes how Jesus presents this gift to the disciples. It is a little different version than the Pentecost story. On the evening of Easter, Jesus appears to the disciples in a lock room. Then, "...he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. (John 20:22a) He commissioned them by opening his mouth and pouring what was inside of him onto them. They could literally smell his breath and smell where he'd been. It wasn't just the smell of a tomb or the death of Golgotha and even the smell of Galilee where he taught them. It was smell far beyond-back when the world was being born because this gift is the very breath that God used to form the world. That's the word that is used, the same word used to describe God breathing life into the world at on the first day of creation.

Those disciples could smell the very breath that separated the water from the earth, then new smell of life in a the formation of Eden, the smells of God's breath when God scooped up dust, shaped it like clay

and blew the breath of life into Adam and Eve. They filled their lungs with his breath and as they breathed out, it was as if they had been created all over again.²

It is a different perspective on the Holy Spirit. Instead of the Spirit being God's fiery violent wind, it's God's gentle breath. Instead of pushing us around it's nurturing us. I'll admit to liking the latter rather than the former. I'm uncomfortable being blown around and appearing drunk, but I'm very comfortable, even eager to be filled by God's breath and I like the thought of being nurtured. In fact, most Christians are this way. Over the centuries since the first Pentecost, there have been more who breathed God's breath than harnessed God's violent wind.

This may be the real reason that Pentecost isn't as big as Christmas or Easter. It's hard to celebrate something that is more inside you than out, something that people can see and touch and identify. But we should celebrate it, even as we affirm that the Holy Spirit is actively working at filling us today as believers. It's a gift promised by Jesus. When we receive him in our lives, God's breath will fill us, change us, shape us, help us. I don't know anyone who can say that at some time in their life they don't need help. I know I do and I know where I find it.

The Holy Spirit is inside us to help us face temptation.

The Holy Spirit is in us to help with strength and endurance during trials.

The Holy Spirit is in us to help with hope and peace during difficult times.

The Holy Spirit is in us to help us know when we've done wrong.

The Holy Spirit is in us, helping us to pray, understand God's Word, and make wise decisions.

When you face these things, sense a presence, strength, help, that's the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is our helper, our advocate, God's breath in us. Helper. If I'd had my wits about me, when that familiar clerk asks, "Sir, can I help you?" I would have responded, "No, I already have a Helper. That's what the Holy Spirit is. I am looking for a card to say thank you"

That's it, isn't it? That what a Pentecost card should be. A Thank You card for God's gift. I'm grateful for the Holy Ghost or Holy Spirit, or whatever you chose to call him. And I hope you are too. Give thanks for this day and for the gift promise and given, God's breath in you and in me.

¹ <http://www.theonion.com/content/node/31330/print>,

² This paragraph and the sermon title is inspired by God's Breath, Barbara Brown Taylor, Journal for Preachers, 26.04, pp.3704, ATLA Serials.