

Holy Spirit

Life-giving Breath



Wind and fire are symbols of the transforming power of the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Trinity. For us in Australia, the above picture can remind us not only of the Holy Spirit, but also of the power of bushfires and our fear of them in the summer. We know about wild fires that cannot be controlled, travelling at speed, jumping barriers, springing up and spreading wherever they will.

In Acts 2:1-4, we read of the Holy Spirit filling the disciples on the Jewish festival of Pentecost. The presence of the Holy Spirit was made known in the sound of a rushing violent wind and when “divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them.”

Fire and wind are indeed appropriate images of the Holy Spirit who is wild, and cannot be restricted by us. God’s Spirit appears where it wills, in unexpected people and places, both inside and outside of the church, and in nature.

Although the Holy Spirit is powerful and free, it is also gentle and encouraging. The Spirit manifests the love of Jesus who offered new life to the weak and outcasts, such as lepers banished from their town, children being sent away, and a Samaritan woman he met about midday at a well.

Each Sunday we recite in the creed: “We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the

giver of life..."

In the act of creation in Genesis 1, God's Spirit, described as a wind from God, moved over the dark waters bringing life. Further, in Genesis 2:7, a human being, formed by God from dust, became a *living* being when God breathed life into the person's nostrils. Breath is also an image of the Holy Spirit.

Another description of God's breath giving life is in John 20:22, when the risen Jesus in the Upper Room in Jerusalem breathed on his disciples saying, "Receive the Holy Spirit". Even though breath can be gentle, it is as important and powerful as a strong wind and fire, perhaps more so. We know that when people stop breathing, it is sometimes possible to bring them back to life by breathing into their lungs.

As Christians, we believe that the life in our world comes from and is renewed and sustained by the Holy Spirit or breath of God. We see this in Jesus, bearer of the Spirit.

Jesus was conceived through the Holy Spirit, and at his baptism, he received the Holy Spirit to guide and empower him for his ministry, (Mark 1:10). Today when Christians are baptised they are given new life through the Spirit, and at Confirmation are strengthened and empowered by the same Spirit for their life and work in the world.

The image of the Holy Spirit as a gentle breath leads us to see it nurturing those struggling to have faith in Jesus, and later giving them the hope of new life in Christ. When a church group draws on the power and guidance of the Holy Spirit to compassionately serve others, it is found to be life-giving for the group and for those they help.

The breath of the Holy Spirit, as the simile of "tongues as of fire" suggests, is involved in our speaking. In Genesis, the Spirit of God at creation is present not only in the wind but also in God's speaking. God spoke the Word (God's Son) giving life (God's Spirit) to the world.

In his ministry, the words of Jesus often brought healing and new life to those he met. The words we say to others can be life-giving when, directed by the Holy Spirit, we use them to comfort and encourage others. Our words can also destroy life when we use them to ridicule or abuse others.

In John 14:26 Jesus talks about the Holy Spirit as an advocate the Father will send to teach us and remind us of all he has revealed to us of the Father's love. An advocate in this sense, is one who stands beside us, and is a friend, who teaches, guides and strengthens us.

The Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Truth, is given to us, not to turn our attention on ourselves, but to help us follow in the way of Jesus. We who have received the life-giving breath of the Spirit are to use this gift for others. Open to the Spirit, we allow it to work through us as we walk alongside others in mutual friendship, serving and encouraging them, and in turn being served and assisted by them.

In John 14:23 Jesus tells his disciples that the Father and he will come and make their *home* in those, "who love me and will keep my word". The Spirit comes from the Father and the Son and is the love that binds both together. The same Spirit fills us and draws us to life in God, the place where we belong and were created finally to be.

Loved by God, we are daily strengthened by the Holy Spirit to participate in God's mission, individually and as a church, revealing God's life-giving love to others through our words, actions, and lives.

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May 2017