

Thomas R. Cook  
Sermon #477 Trinity Church – Swarthmore, PA  
8:00 a.m. and 10:00 a.m. Celebrations of the Holy Eucharist  
The Fifth Sunday after Pentecost – June 15, 2008

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“Breathe In; Breathe Out”

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Scripture: Matthew 9:35 – 10:8; 5 Pentecost A, Proper 6 (RCL)

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I can sum up my entire sermon for you this morning with two simple words: **[Breathe in conspicuously and deeply; exhale in like manner.]** That was it. Okay, they're not really words, but they do deliver the message. Breathe in; breathe out. It's the rhythm of life all around us. We do it. The animals do it. The fish and the insects and the trees and the plants do it. Sometimes I wonder... if we could only listen quietly enough for long enough, would we hear the great inhalation and exhalation of the world itself, the expansion and contraction of unseen terrestrial lungs, the breath of life moving in and out within our little cosmic bubble of an earth? Nothing is wasted. What we exhale from our bodies is inhaled by the trees and plants around us, and what they return, the very oxygen we breathe, is taken in again by us and other creatures, and round and round it goes, giving life, sustaining life by breath, in and out.

Is it any wonder then that we talk about God in these same terms? The very Hebrew word for God's spirit moving in the world is also the word for wind... and

the word for breath: *Ruach*, the breath of God. And the rhythm of the life of Spirit is that same rhythm of the breath, drawing in and pressing out: breathing in, breathing out.

Shall I give you an example of this “breathing” of the Spirit? We have already heard one here this morning. “... Jesus summoned his twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to cure every disease and every sickness... These twelve Jesus sent out...”

You know, the disciples didn’t just come to Jesus. They weren’t hanging around downtown one day wondering what to do on a lazy afternoon, until one of them said, “Hey, let’s go follow Jesus!” They weren’t looking in the “Help Wanted” ads to find a new religious vocation. They were going about their daily work as fishermen or tax collectors, maybe as laborers or police officers or carpenters or farmers or merchants. We don’t really know what all these people were doing, but we can be sure they weren’t aspiring to the unpaid, unappreciated, unknown position of “disciple.” Yet it is here that the “breath” comes in. “Jesus *summoned* his twelve disciples...” the scripture says. He pulled them to himself. He called them. He breathed them in. And to what end? So he could send them out again, so he could expel them into a larger world.

Now, can you imagine how bewildering this experience must have been for these twelve people? One moment you are smelling of fish, trying to get the best price you can for your catch; the next moment you are being told to leave your home to tell people the kingdom of God is near, to be a healer and a preacher and a worker of wonders. I imagine these men, sucked in by the breath of God's Spirit, gathered around Jesus by some compelling force they didn't entirely understand, standing there with eyes wide open when he points the finger at them and says, "You and you, and you, yes, you Andrew, and you too James." Don't you imagine they were incredulous? *"What do you mean me? I catch fish. I'm no healer. I'm no holy man."* *"Me? You have to be joking, Jesus. A tax collector is the last person on earth that people will trust to tell them about God, and you want me to go out and preach the Kingdom?"* Exactly. Breathe in. Breathe out. This is the rhythm of the life of Spirit, the life of faith in God. And it is our rhythm to this day.

Now I'm sure that at least most of us here today believe that we decided to come here of our own volition, to gather as church the corner Chester and College, that it is our own decisions that set things in motion that led to a shower and some breakfast and some clean clothes and a drive or a stroll to Trinity Church. Well, surely you have some part in this. But don't overlook the very real and distinct possibility that something has breathed you in. There are many occasions and occurrences in our lives that draw us to faith, or maybe press us away from it, or cause

us to question it or to seek answers in places we haven't known before. But in all the conversations I have ever had about faith, in all the experiences that people have shared with me, there is that common piece of "call" that rises to the surface. It manifests itself in many ways: *"I just felt like I needed to be in church."* *"I don't know, for some reason I felt like I was missing something in my life when I stopped thinking about God."* *"I'm interested in doing something good for the world."* *"I need a place to pray."* *"I guess I want my children to know something about God."* There's always something compelling about a life of faith, something drawing us in, even if we think we just come to church because we always do, or it's what is socially acceptable, or because my parents make me come. Things have conspired to draw us in, nonetheless; we are caught in the great inhalation of the Spirit, breathed in by the rhythms of the life of Spirit.

...Which means we better put on our safety belts, because we know what comes next. We're going to get breathed out! We will be pushed out there. But it's the reason we got breathed in in the first place! Here's one way I have heard it said: "The essence for the passage [of scripture we hear today]... is about claiming the centrality of purpose, of mission for the Christian faith... All program, all structure, all leadership should center in this 'preach and heal' purpose. This 'manifesting' [of faith] forms the heart of Apostolic Christianity. All else is details."\* In short: **[Breathe in conspicuously and deeply; exhale in like manner.]** We're drawn

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\*From Synthesis for June 15, 2008.

together “in here” in order to be blown out again to share what we learn and know here in service to others “out there”.

I know you will hear more of this in the days ahead, but I want to share with you a few things said in our Episcopal Church that are very much a part of breathing. The first comes from your own vestry, meeting in retreat a week ago. When trying to understand what God would have us be and do as church in the days ahead, this statement is what came to mind and heart as a place to begin:

*The goal / emphasis for Trinity Church for program year 2008-2009 is to live out its Mission Statement by engaging and energizing the parish and its members in Service to Others (Outreach).*

The next is recently offered by Katharine Jefferts Shori, our presiding bishop, who says: ... “Mission literally means "sending," and for us it means what we're here to do and be. In a large view, it's about partnering in building the Reign of God. In daily life, you and I get countless opportunities to engage in that mission. I want to offer another resource. The Anglican Communion has been talking and teaching about Five Marks of Mission for more than 20 years, yet most Episcopalians have never heard about this framework for our participation in God's mission of healing the world.

Those five marks of mission include:

- To proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom

- To teach, baptize and nurture new believers
- To respond to human need by loving service
- To seek to transform unjust structures of society
- To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation and sustain and renew the life of the earth

And finally, something from the rector, recently published in our parish Newsletter, *The Chronicle*: What we give here with Trinity Church, the person we become here, ultimately goes “out there” in a mission of love to the world we live in. It’s all outreach. And we are all missionaries.

Breathe in; breathe out.