



Sermons from Northwood United Church

**“Join the conspiracy.”
Ezekiel 37:1-14, Acts 2:1-20
Will Sparks May 27, 2012**

May the words of my mouth, the meditations of our hearts and the actions of our lives be acceptable in your sight, O God, our strength and our redeemer. Amen.

I invite you to take a deep breath, filling your lungs with good clean air, and then letting it out. Did you know that the word ‘conspire’ means to breathe together? Take a breath. Now blow it out again. There! You have just launched a conspiracy. Conspire- to be filled with the same spirit- enlivened by the same wind. What happens between us when we gather in Jesus’ name is that God’s wind swoops in and between us, drawing us together through songs we sing and prayers we pray and the breath we breathe. Jesus said “Where two or three are gathered in my name I am there with them” and, the spirit takes us residence exactly here, in the spaces between us. As we pay attention to these spaces between us and breathe together, we conspire.

Now take another breath. If you have ever studied the earth you know that there is a protective veil we call atmosphere that separates us from the cold void of space. Underneath this veil is all the air we know about. There is no more. There is no cosmic cleaning system that comes in every Tuesday and sucks the old air out and pushes new air in. No this air we breathe just re-circulates incessantly. Always has, since the first amphibians crawled out of the slime, since before the first breath entered us at the creation. Think about that for a second. That means that every time one of us breathes, we breathe star dust left over from the original creation. We breathe dinosaur breath. We breathe the air of the rainforest and of driest Africa. We breathe the breath of Plato and Mozart and Michaelangelo, of Hitler and Osama Bin Ladden. The breath we breathe was once some baby’s first breath, and some dying person’s last. We take it in, we use it for life, and we let it go, only to be transformed in use by another being that lives.

Jesus let go his last breath, and it hovered in the air gathering strength and purpose until, full of life and passion it swept into that cloistered huddled bunch of puzzled followers and Jesus’ friends breathed his breath into themselves, and it worked. Sparks burst into flames above their heads or in their minds and a mighty wind blew a quality of life and character into that group which allowed them to sound and act, teach and heal like never before. Shy ones became bold, scared became gutsy, and lost people were found by a sure sense of direction. Disciples, uncertain of anything, discovered a confidence they never could have imagined. They had sucked in God’s very breath and it transformed them. God’s Spirit entered them much like it entered Mary and for the same purpose- a new birth- not a single isolated body this time, but a body of followers who shared the same breath of life. A conspiracy was born.

The book of Acts is the story of this conspiring. I think of it as the Acts of the Spirit. Barbara Brown Taylor calls it the Gospel of the Holy Spirit, because it is the good news of what God did through the Spirit, bringing to life an uncertain rag tag knot of Galileans, transforming them and creating a power that changed history.

Now my question is, do we still believe in a God who acts like that? Do we still believe in a God who blows life breath through closed doors and sets our heads on fire? Do we still believe in a God with power to transform us, both individually and together, or have we come to an unspoken agreement that our God is pretty old and tired by now, someone to whom we can address our prayers but not someone we actually expect will change our lives?

Trying to talk about God's spirit is not easy because it is, well... insubstantial, elusive. Even Jesus had a hard time. "The Spirit blows where it wills, and you hear it but you do not know where it comes from or where it is going." But he also said, I will send you a comforter, an advocate, a peace bringer. And before Jesus in our Jewish heritage we have that amazing vision of Ezekiel brought to the dispirited people in exile. There it is again. Dispirited- another spirit word. They were discouraged, depressed, despair had taken hold of them. The spirit had gone out of them. They were dry bones. And the vision came offering life again and that life was seen as breath. This is all good metaphorical stuff that helps us talk about what is essentially mystery. But I hope you will be forever unsatisfied with what I or anyone else ever says about the Spirit of God except to the degree that you have felt God's Spirit blow through your own life, rearranging things, opening things up, setting things on fire. There is nothing you can do really to make it happen, except perhaps to pray, "come holy Spirit" whenever you get the chance. But you know, if you want things to stay the same, for heaven sake don't pray the Spirit prayer. Where we are open to the Spirit, there our life moves and changes. So if you are game for life to move, to change, if you are the kind of person who stands out on the porch in a thunderstorm hoping to feel the power of it, and watch it push trees around, then you are probably up for the Spirit prayer.

And how will you know if you have experienced it? Well, likely you already have but may not know it. Once you get the hang of looking for it, the evidence of the Spirit seems to pop up everywhere: wherever $2 + 2$ equals 5, whenever you find yourself speaking with eloquence when you were not planning on speaking at all, whenever you find yourself taking risks you thought you didn't have the courage for, whenever you find yourself reaching out to someone you had planned to bypass, well, you can be pretty sure that you are experiencing the Gospel of the Holy Spirit.

Take another breath. Now just keep breathing and prepare for the transformation. Do we still believe in a God who's Spirit is as close as this, as alive as this, acts like this? Do we still experience a God like this? I don't know what your answer is, but I invite you to join the conspiracy and see what happens. Amen