

## **Walk in the Spirit, Pray in the Spirit**

Sermon #1: Breath of Life

Study Text: Genesis 1:1-2, 2:4-9

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Preacher: Mary Ellen Azada

**Sermon Series Introduction:** Along with Judaism and Islam, Christianity is counted among the great monotheistic faiths. But orthodox Christianity is unique, first in our insistence on the historical incarnation of God in Jesus Christ, and then second in our understanding that the One God is self-revealed as a Trinity: Father, Son, Holy Spirit. This is a mystery, but also one worth pursuing and meditating on as we seek to follow God. The first four sermons of Family Worship this summer will explore the person and work of the Holy Spirit in some of the classic texts that illuminate our understanding of God as Trinity.

Both before his crucifixion and after his resurrection, Jesus promises the gift of his own presence, the Holy Spirit (John 14:18-27, 15:26-27, 16:5-15; Matthew 28:20). How are we to understand this promise? How can it be an animating doctrine of our Christian walk? If the doctrine of the incarnation is an affront to many people (and it is!), then the doctrine of the Holy Spirit can be confusing; not least because it's so non-material and yet also laden with cultural baggage.

### **Bible Study Introduction:**

The words for Spirit in Hebrew and Greek are most commonly “wind” and “breath,” respectively. We affirm the Trinity by seeing the life-giving animating work of the Holy Spirit from the very beginning, not only as a gift after Jesus' ascension. The Spirit of God hovers over creation; the Spirit of God breathes life into us all. If God is a Trinity, then that has always been the case. God has always been breathing life into his people. This creative role in Genesis is given fresh promise in Ezekiel 37.

### **Opening Questions:**

- What images, both positive and negative, come to you when you hear mention of the Holy Spirit? Where do those ideas come from?
- Many people have tried to explain the Trinity. What images or metaphors have you used that might be helpful?<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> A challenge: can you come up with an image that doesn't fall into modalism? In short, modalism is an understanding of God as a unity who merely appears in one mode at a time. It is the most common heresy we fall into when we seek to understand the Trinity. Here is an example: God starts with the mode of the Father for creation, *then* the Son for the task of redemption, *and after*, the Holy Spirit for regeneration. While this emphasizes our monotheism, it breaks with the Trinitarian notion of three distinct coequal, coeternal, coexistent persons in relationship with one another as a unity.

One common analogy that reflects modalism is analogizing God with water. Many have tried to say that God is like water since water can be ice, liquid, or vapor in form. This might be helpful in some ways, but do you also see how it is modalistic? In only the rarest of circumstances do all three exist at one time, and then never in relationship with one another.

**Read Genesis 1:1-3**

- What important things can be said about God, and the Holy Spirit particularly, in this opening passage of Genesis? Why are these things important to affirm about God?
- Many Christian theologians see these opening three verses as already pointing to the self-revelation of God as a Trinity. Do you agree? Why might this matter?

**Read Genesis 2:4-9**

- What important things can be said about God, and the Holy Spirit particularly, in this passage of Genesis? Why are these things important to affirm about God?
- Remembering that “breathe” in v.7 is the same word often used for the Holy Spirit in Scripture—what additional things can you say about the Holy Spirit?
- What additional insight do you have about humanity and our being created in God’s image?

**Read Ezekiel 37:1-14**

- What important things can be said about God, and the Holy Spirit particularly, in this passage? Why are these things important to affirm about God?
- This is a dramatic promise, do you understand this promise to still be unfulfilled, or begun in Jesus Christ? How does either answer inform the way you live your faith?

**Group or Personal Reflection**

- In your own understanding of the Holy Spirit, what needs to be shifted, opened up, or re-examined?
- As the third person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit hovers over us, breathes into us, gives us life, and promises deep redemption and renewal. Those aren’t the only things we could affirm about the Holy Spirit, but which of those most describes your own experience of the Holy Spirit at the moment?
- How would a growing awareness of the Holy Spirit’s work in your life alter the way you live?