



## God the Holy Spirit: Breath of New Life

### Theology Statement

Religious communities of faith are not the only places where God can be encountered. God is at work throughout the world, in God’s own creation, in every people, nation and community and through more ways than we can count or ever know. This is what Christians mean to describe when they talk about the Holy Spirit. In the Gospel according to John, Jesus likened the Holy Spirit to the wind – we can’t see it nor do we know when or where it will blow. In saying this, Jesus was making a pun. In both Hebrew and Greek, the word we translate as “spirit” can also be translated as “breath” or “wind.”

This gospel pun can remind us of the opening chapter of Genesis, where we read about the “wind” or “breath” of God moving over the chaos in the divine act of creation and giving breath to every living creature. It can also remind us of another moment in John’s Gospel, when the risen Jesus appears to his disciples and breathes on them. “Receive holy breath,” he says to them and then charges them with the work of reconciliation. So even though, like the wind, we cannot see the Spirit, we can recognize the Spirit’s effects: in forgiveness and reconciliation, in movements for social justice, in the healing of old wounds, in the very breath of life itself.

Anglican Christians believe the Holy Spirit continues to work throughout the world in all these many and diverse ways and not just in the Church. Wherever artists are inspired or communities of reconciliation emerge or new life rises up from the ashes of violence and death, there, we believe, the holy, life-giving breath of God is active. At the same time, we certainly do believe the Holy Spirit continues to guide our church communities and to shape us, in all our diversity, into God’s people. We continue to invoke the Spirit’s presence among us whenever we gather for worship and we believe that holy breath moves among us, knitting us together into loving community.

In the Episcopal Church today, the Holy Spirit is manifested in countless ways – some of them dramatic, others more subtle. By turning as a community to Scripture, to our traditions and to our own various experiences, we seek to discern how this breath of God is animating and shaping our common life. Overall we rely on the Apostle Paul’s claim that the Spirit is making us into the body of Christ in the world. The same Spirit, the same holy breath that animated Jesus for his life and ministry animates us to continue that ministry of new life in our working, our playing, our creating, our loving and our justice-making.

Paul, likewise, makes clear that the body of Christ is made up of various gifts and skills. The diversity we find in Christian community is one of the effects and gifts of the Holy Spirit, which we seek to embrace in the Episcopal Church. Embracing diversity is a constant challenge in Christian community, which God calls us to engage. On the day of Pentecost, for example, the Holy Spirit gave Jesus' disciples the ability to preach the Gospel in many different languages. We seek to do the same thing as Episcopalians as we invite the vast diversity of the human family around the Eucharistic table, where each of us is welcomed and embraced for who we are.

## Take-Home Materials for Session Four

The work of the Gospel calls us to go out into the world, to take the learning, prayer, and spirit of the community to the people of God who are not gathered in our community. This week, as you reflect on your experience, here are some resources to focus your meditation, prayer, and study. You may have time to do all of these things during your week. You may only have time for some of the suggestions. Whatever you do, please keep the members of your small group in your thoughts as you carry out your work.

From, *Loyalty to God: The Apostles' Creed in Life & Liturgy* by Theodore W. Jennings, Jr., Abingdon Press, Nashville, 1992

We recall that in the biblical accounts the Spirit of God is given to persons to make them capable of performing tasks or missions that relate to community or society as a whole. When Samson received the Spirit, he received the capacity to do that which God wanted – to liberate the people. When David received the Spirit it was in order to undertake the public responsibility of leadership and kingship. The prophets were given the Spirit, not for their own spiritual entertainment, but to enable them to speak clearly and forcefully to the public life of the society as a whole, thereby confronting that social, economic, and political reality with the word of God.

Thus we should say that the Holy Spirit is never separated from public responsibility, and therefore, from mission. We never hear of the gift of the Spirit that is concerned primarily with the interior and private lives of individuals. This is of primary importance, for all too often in the Church, persons speak of the Spirit only or primarily in connection with the interior life, with the life that is personal and private. This idea is so prevalent in the Church that we speak of such things as “spiritual retreats” and think of spiritual life as that life which is separated from the world. But this is an idea that is completely impossible from the biblical standpoint. A “spiritual retreat” is an oxymoron. The Spirit is that which enables us to engage in mission, that which empowers us to witness and work in the world.

*Prayer for the Week (Book of Common Prayer, pg. 251)*

### **Of the Holy Spirit**

Almighty and most merciful God, grant that by the indwelling of your Holy Spirit we may be enlightened and strengthened for your service; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

*Scripture for the Week*

For you were called to freedom, brothers and sisters; only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for self-indulgence, but through love serve one another. For the whole law is summed up in a single commandment, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not subject to the law. The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against such things. And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live by the Spirit, let us also be guided by the Spirit.

**Galatians 5:13-14, 18, 22-25**, New Revised Standard Version

*Journaling*

Journaling is a good way for adults to pay attention to their faith lives. You are encouraged to journal so that you can consider the questions that develop during our time together. Like with other prayer disciplines, it often helps to pick a time to write in your journal each day, setting it aside in some way. The question to think about as you write this week appears below.

*Reflection for the Week*

The participants in the video make the statement: "When you are lost, and can't see anything, there are people who love you who are looking for you, trying to find you. That's the essence of the Spirit – someone who loves you and seeks you out. Love brings you in, and Love sends you out." Relate yourself and your experiences past and present, to the sought, and to the seeker.