

Reading Genesis, chapter 1, verses 1-3:

"In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form and void, and the darkness was upon the face of the deep; and the Spirit of God was moving over the face of the waters. And God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light."

The Hebrew word for Spirit is also the word for Wind or Breath. "The Wind of God was moving over the face of the deep."

"The Breath of God was moving over the face of the deep."

"Ru-ach" is a powerful word. It means so much in Hebrew. There is no way to translate it with just one English word.

The Ru-ach of God was moving over the face of the deep. And God spoke.

The writer of Genesis could imagine that the Breath of God was used to form the words God spoke. "Let there be light."

And the Words formed with the Breath of God were so powerful that light was created out of nothing.

So, John, when he wrote his Gospel, is imagining the same thing. In the beginning, when God spoke, God created the world using the Ru-ach of God, the Breath of God. The Word of God can only be formed with the Breath of God. And the Breath of God was God.

So John writes, in Chapter 1, verses 1-4: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The Word was in the beginning with God; all things were made through the Word, and without the Word was not anything made that was made."

The Breath of God, the Word of God, was moving over the face of the deep. And God spoke, "Let there be light," and there was light. The Word of God created light. The Power of the Breath of God is in the Word of God. So God, the Breath of God, and the Word of God, are all one and the same, like the Trinity.

Now we move to Genesis chapter 2, verse 7.

"Then the LORD God formed human beings of dust from the ground, and breathed into their nostrils the Breath of Life; and human beings became living souls."

Here again, the Ru-ach of God is used. But a Word is not spoken here. God formed us of dust from the ground, and then God Breathed into our nostrils the Breath of Life, the Ru-ach of God. And we became living souls with the power to do good or evil.

We are alive because the Ru-ach of God is in us. But God does not control us like puppets. We can choose to do evil or good.

God is always with us. We are never alone. God is always calling to us in our souls, with every breath we take; God reminds us that without the Ru-ach of God, the Breath of God, we are dead.

God loves us and calls us constantly, to do God's Work. But we can tune God out. We can be so caught up in the cultures and civilizations we have created that we stop listening to God.

Just like many of us, Isaiah did not hear God call to him until he was an adult. But when Isaiah finally stopped his busy life long enough to listen, Isaiah heard God calling to him.

Reading from Isaiah chapter 6, verse 8: "And I heard the voice of the LORD saying 'Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?'"

And without hesitation, Isaiah answered, "Here I am! Send me." And thus began Isaiah's long service to the LORD.

Long after Isaiah answered God's call to him, Isaiah came to understand that God had been calling him from the beginning of his life. Isaiah just didn't understand it until he was an adult.

Isaiah writes in chapter 49, "The LORD called me from the womb, from the body of my mother, God named my name. . . . And God said to me, 'You are my servant in whom I will be glorified.'"

When God breathes into your nostrils the Breath of Life and you become a living soul, you are filled with the Breath of God.

Not only is God a part of your life from the beginning, but then, God calls you from the womb, from the body of your mother, God names your name. Your name is a WORD. When God Calls you from the womb, and names your name, you become a Living Word of God.

Every one of us is a Living Word of God, because God calls each one of us by name. God knows us personally. The problem is that not all of us have developed our personal relationship with God.

God is calling each of us right now, and God has been doing so from the very beginning of time.

Let's pause here for a little activity.

When you woke up this morning and took your first conscious breath, How did it feel. Wonderful? Did it hurt a little? Were you stopped up, feeling stuffy? Maybe you have a cold coming on, perhaps a touch of flu? Or did it just feel good to breathe and be alive?

If you took a shower, the air in the shower is usually heavy with water vapor. It feels good for a while but it is also harder to breath because it is heavier.

Then you step out of the shower and take that first breath of lighter air. That usually feels pretty good.

What about getting into your coat and stepping outside and that cold air hits your face and you inhale.

On a spring morning that can feel Wonderful. But in the winter, the chill can hit you deep in the chest and make you cough.

Do any of you remember watching Sesame Street when they used to have that short skit?

"Breathe in, Breathe out! Breathe in, Breathe out!
Breathe in, Breathe out! Breathe in, Breathe out!
You're ALIVE!"

That's how we are supposed to feel. Alive!

Now let's all stop for a moment and Breathe in slowly the way the Doctor tells you to breathe, when he's listening to you breathe.

Ever have a yogi class and you are supposed to breathe together as a group. Let's see if we can Breathe in and out together.

Inhale.

Exhale.

Inhale.

Exhale.

(Wait a minute or so, breathing into the microphone)

This is like Communion. Being aware of our Aliveness, in Christ, at the same time. And Celebrating it.

In ancient Israel, people would say, when some one died, "The Breath is not in him."

In Luke, chapter 23, verse 46, it says: "Then Jesus, crying out with a loud voice, said, 'Father, into they hands I commit my spirit!' And having said this, he breathed his last."

The breath was not in him.

Now, remember, the Hebrew language has the same word for Breath and for Spirit; the same word for Wind and Spirit; Ru-ach! That Hebrew word sounds like wind, doesn't it. Ru-ach!

As with our Native Americans, God was the Great Spirit, to ancient Hebrews; God was the Great Breath, the source of all LIFE, the source of all BREATH.

About thirty years ago, Sting wrote a song the Police sang together. He wrote it during a bitter divorce. And he never understood why people liked it so much, because it was a song about obsession, possession, and control. He wrote it when he was angry and jealous.

"Every move you make! Every Breath you take!
I'll be watching you."

But that is just the kind of relationship God had with Israel in most of the Old Testament. God was a jealous God. God was a possessive God. Thou shalt not have any gods before me.

Remember that?

Ancient Hebrews believed that God, the giver of Breath, could take that Breath away in an instant. So God was a God to be feared and obeyed.

This is not the God of Isaiah. This is not the God of Micah.
This is not the God of Jesus. This is not the God of Christians.

The God of Isaiah lovingly breathes into our nostrils the breath of life. The God of Isaiah lovingly calls us from the womb, from the bodies of our mothers God calls our names.

And God says, "You are my servant, in whom I will be glorified."

And we haven't done anything yet. We haven't even been born.

Why does God do this?

Because God is with us from the very beginning, calling to us. Because God believes in us and has plans for us to do God's work.

God gives us life, and then God calls us and hopes for the best.

And as God waits for our answer, God watches every move we make, every breath we take, from inside us.

You see, God cannot force us to serve God. We have been given the freedom to choose between good and evil all of our days.

All God can do is pour himself into our human forms and call out to us, asking us, "Whom Shall I send? Who will go for us?" And we have the choice. We can say, "Hear I am, send me."

Or, we can turn away,

turn a deaf ear,

pretend we don't understand,

and do, only what pleases us,

or, do what pleases someone else, who isn't God.

Like our friends, or our family, or the IN CROWD,

Or, do what is popular, but not what is right in the eyes of God.

Everything I have been talking about this morning is natural. It's the way God's creation works.

God breathes into everyone the breath of life. Everyone is a living soul because God gave us life. And God is a part of everyone, because the Breath of God is in us.

But that doesn't mean that the Will of God shall be done by every soul who has life. Many of us choose evil over good.

Many of us choose, not to seek justice, or, not do loving kindness. And most of us do not choose to walk humbly with God.

There are too many people out there who tell you that they have all the answers. You are not ready for democracy, they say. You can't be trusted to rule yourselves.

Some people say, Listen to me I have all the Bible answers you need. Follow me. Do what I say. Send money.

And in our country, where we have freedom of speech, people and companies and organizations with lots of money can advertise falsehood as truth. And the American public will believe it and vote for it. Because sound bites are more powerful than that still small voice of God in our souls.

God is within you. You do not need me to tell you what to do. Listen to that still small voice, but remember, you can be so selfish and cruel, and not realize it. So that still small voice might not be God. For God will never ask you to kill. God will never ask for your first born for the sin of your soul.

As Micah said, "What does the Lord require of you, but to do justice and loving kindness and walk humbly with your God."

This is what Jesus did. It got him into a lot of trouble. It got him killed. But Jesus understood the risks.

In the Garden of Gethsemane Jesus prayed, "Father, if it be possible, take this cup away from me. But not my will, but thine be done."

Jesus said, I will do what you ask of me. I am your servant in whom you will be glorified.

Jesus followed Isaiah's path. "Here I am. Send me." Jesus said.

Getting back to each of us being a Living Word of God.

We are part of a natural process. And that is just the way God planned it.

In Isaiah chapter 55, verses 10-11: Says the LORD,

"For, as the Rain and the Snow Come down from heaven,
And return not thither but water the earth,

Making it bring forth and sprout,
Giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater,
So shall my Word be
That goes forth from my mouth;
It shall not return to me empty,
But it shall accomplish that, which I purpose,
And prosper in the thing for which I sent it."

God breathed into us the Breath of Life and We became living souls. Then God called us from the womb, from the bodies of our mothers God called our names, and said, "You are my servant in whom I will be glorified."

Each of us is a Living Word of God that has come from the mouth of God. And God hopes that we will not return to God, empty. But that we will accomplish what God has planned for us.

We have a purpose. We are called to be servants of God. And if we do what God asks of us we will glorify God in the process.

All our lives God has been calling us. Sometimes we ignore God. Sometimes we just pretend to go along with God when our hearts aren't in it. Other times we said, "Yes, Lord. Yes, Lord." But we don't do it anyway.

But on that occasion when we are fully present, doing God's will with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength, it feels so good. We feel so good. Because in that instant we are God's love in action. We are the Christ, alive and well, doing the will of God.

God does not call everyone to be preachers, or missionaries in the pure sense. But, God does call each of us to do God's will in our own life situation. Whatever your job, you can do it God's way. Whatever the situation, we can do God's will, or not. We choose.

It isn't easy. It is hard work to do God's will. It takes a commitment.

There are so many distractions. And there are ways to be Selfish and concerned only about ourselves and our family or group.

Sometimes people think, "Oh, I can do that." when God calls them. But what they do is the minimum effort. They do what satisfies themselves or some ritual they have developed.

For example, long ago the ancient Hebrews had a tradition. Once a year they would take a journey to their High Holy Place and make a blood sacrifice. At one time in their history, they sacrificed their first-born child. Later it was only their daughters that they sacrificed. Still later they substituted the "scapegoat" or other animal for the human sacrifice. Once this annual sacrifice was made, they believed that their duty to God was complete. Their sins were forgiven until the next year when they had to do it all over again.

A once a year, or once a month, or once a week kind of religion is easy. Maybe a once a day kind of religion is easy. Just do it, get it over with, and get on with your life. Do what you want after that.

But God doesn't want that easy occasional sacrifice. God wants us to do God's work every day, every hour; every moment of every hour; every instant of every second.

Every breath you take, every move you make,
God wants you doing God's work.

What's wonderful about the church is that we are not alone. Together we can be God's servant. Together we can be the Body of Christ at work in the world. Where two or three are gathered in Christ's name, Christ will be there also.

God is always with us. When we gather together we can pool our resources and our knowledge and our strength. We can support and encourage one another.

In the Gospel of John, chapter 1, verses 12 and 13, John writes about the Word of God, "But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God; who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but born of God."

John is looking back at our creation. God formed us from dust of the ground and breathed into our nostrils the Breath of Life and we became living souls.

Then God calls us from the womb. God calls our names and says, "You are my servant in whom I will be glorified."

Now, John says, Yea, not just servants, but children of God, brothers and sisters of the Christ. And this happens not because you were born of flesh and blood, but because you are born of the Spirit of God. And this comes to us by FAITH.

God breathed into you the Breath of God. Then God called you from the womb. God named your name. God sent you as a Living Word of God into the world to do God's work.

And now John says, Not just a Living Word of God, but a Child of God, a brother or sister of the Christ.

Individually we are servants of God, Words of God, children of God. But together, we are the Church, the Body of Christ, at work in the world.

We need to remember who we are, where we come from and where we are going.

We are living souls filled with the Breath of God. We are called to be servants glorifying God. We are Living Words of God sent into the world to do what God planned for us to do. We are Children of God, brothers and sisters of the Christ. And together, we are the Church, the Body of Christ, at work in the world.

And at the end of our days, we shall all return to God, and, hopefully, we will have accomplished ALL that God sent us to do. For woe unto us if we return to God, Empty.

And what does the Lord require of us? (Say it with me.)

To love the LORD our God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength; and to love our neighbors as ourselves.

To do justice, to do loving kindness, and to walk humbly with our God.

Would the ushers come forward and pass out the valentine hearts so that everyone has one. When you get a heart, don't write your name on it, just hold on to it while I explain.

When the offering is taken today, I don't want you to pass your heart to some else to put into the offering plate. I want you to put your heart into the offering plate yourself. Don't let anyone else

touch it. It is your heart. Put it into the offering plate yourself. Or don't, if you don't feel like doing it.

Long ago, when I was at Camp Miami, a summer church camp near Germantown, Ohio, a young African woman from Sierra Leone, West Africa, came to lead us in evening vespers. She told a wonderful story. I don't know if it is true, but it has such a beautiful image I want to share with you today.

She said, "In my village in Africa, we had a church. It was the only church in the area so people came from all around to worship.

"One day a boy about six years old was walking by and heard us singing. He came in to see what was going on. The church was full so he stood in the back watching and listening.

"When it came time for the offering, he had nothing to give. It troubled him greatly. He watched as the offering plates were taken down the aisle and placed on the altar at the front of the church.

"Finally, while everyone was singing the closing hymn, that little boy walked down the center aisle, took an offering plate off of the altar, placed it on the ground, and stepped into it."

She said, "A pastor told this story on his first Sunday at that church. He said, 'I was that little boy. Now, here I am to serve the Lord.'"

We can rededicate ourselves to the work of God this morning. Don't put your names on the hearts. We don't need to know your name. God knows your name. Just put your heart into the offering plate yourself. Don't let anyone else give your heart to God. It is only yours to give.

Will the ushers come forward to receive our tithes and offerings of time, talent, and love.