

Waiting (Ascension Day)



“...
Wait
and see what comes
to fill
the gaping hole
in your chest.
Wait with your hands open
to receive what could never come
except to what is empty
and hollow.

You cannot know it now,
cannot even imagine
what lies ahead,
but I tell you
the day is coming
when breath will
fill your lungs
as it never has before
...”.

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Waiting can be hard. But if we know there is something good at the end of it, it becomes easier. Imagine the scene in the upper room, the men and women waiting and praying. How might you have felt about the waiting after one day/five days/seven days? Would prayer have become easier? Or would there be a temptation to give up?

Activities (you can do some, or all):

Set an alarm/timer for a period of waiting. As short or as long as you like. A minute, ten, an hour, two. Decide to do something you will look forward to at the end of that time (have a cup of tea, go into the garden, have a walk, phone someone). Spend the waiting time being still with God. How does the gift you have waited for at the end of this time change the experience of waiting? How does the waiting change your experience of the gift?

Read the extract from the prayer-poem above as a prayer for yourself or for someone else. Look at the image. How does it speak to you at the moment of your journey with God?

Day One: Breath

Do any or all of the following

Reflect:

What kind of picture does “breath” paint as a way to describe the Holy Spirit? (The Holy Spirit is a person, one of the three persons we refer to as the Trinity: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.)

What difference might breath make? Think about the need for ventilators in the current health crisis. Could we think of the Holy Spirit as giving us the kiss of life?

There is a strong connection between the words *breath* and *life*. The Holy Spirit is regularly described as “breath” in Scripture. What might that mean for our need to know and receive this person of the Trinity?

At the beginning of the communion service we often ask God for purity through the “inspiration of your Holy Spirit”. Inspiration is another way of saying “in-breathing”. Does this picture change anything about the way you view God’s transformation?

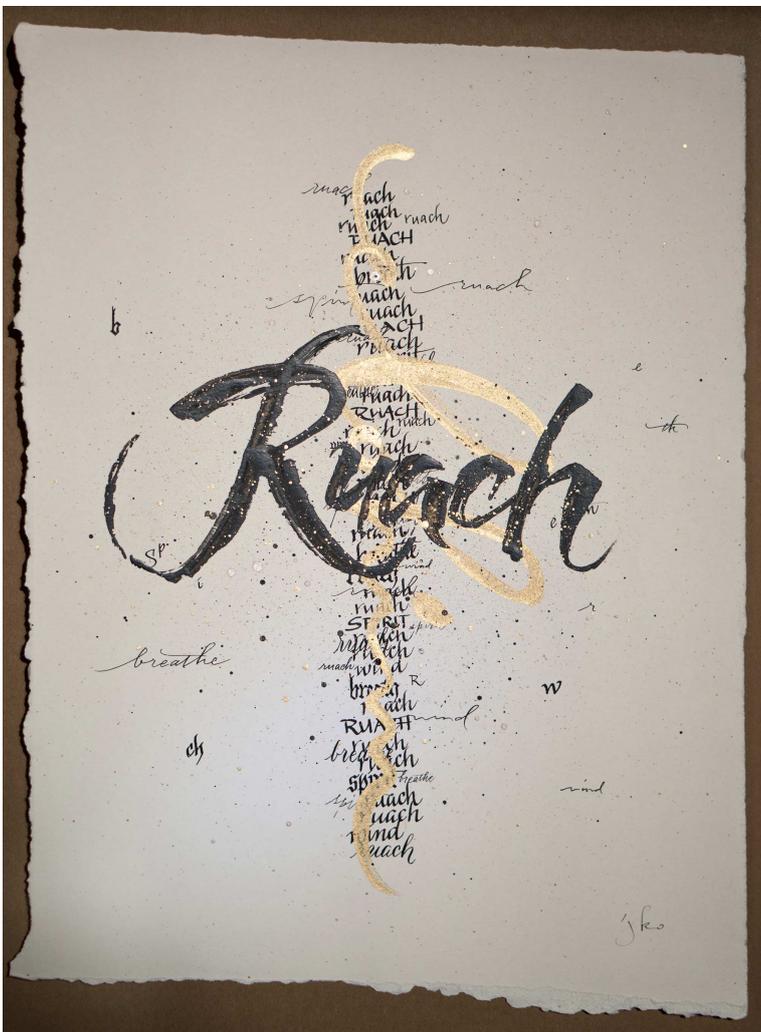
We often sing “Breathe on me, breath of God...” but what are we asking for in these words? Think of Jesus breathing on the disciples. (John 20:22)

Pray: Spend time thinking about your breath today. Notice it. It is a gift from God. Be conscious of that. Thank him. Breath in and out, slowly. Do this a number of times. Spend some time breathing in the word “Jesus” and breathing out “thank you.”

*O Breath of life, come sweeping through us,
revive your church with life and power;
O Breath of life come cleanse, renew us
and fit your church to meet this hour.*

*O Breath of life, come breathe within us,
renewing thought and will and heart;
come, love of Christ, afresh to win us,
revive your church in every part!*

Pray these hymn words for yourself, for someone who needs the life of Jesus, and for the Church.



Ruach means “breath”.

Take time to breathe as you look at this image and respond to it.

Day Two: FireP

Do any or all of the following:

Reflect: Think of fire and how we harness its power, eg: a gas flame, barbecue, bonfire, industry. What can fire create? Fire can also be harmful. We often refer to wildfires which are out of control. What sort of fire comes from the Holy Spirit? How would you categorise it?

C.S.Lewis writes, speaking of Aslan "He's not safe. But he's good." How do you find this as a way to think of the fire of the Holy Spirit?



Read: *Exodus 3:1-6*

Put yourself in Moses' shoes (or take them off!). If it helps, look at this picture:

Burning Bush. Seventeenth century painting by Sébastien Bourdon in the Hermitage Museum, Saint Petersburg

Do you think you would have "turned aside to look", or run away? Why does God's presence sometimes make us respond in fear?

Imagine the apostles' reaction to the Pentecost flames on their heads. How do you think you might respond to this kind of manifestation of God's presence, his life touching yours?



Action: What can happens to fire when we try to control it too much? What might we do to try to keep a fire burning and benefit from its warmth?

Light a match and watch it burn. How frequently would you need to light another match to keep warm in the cold? Does this clarify our need to pray for the Holy Spirit in our lives?

Pray one of the following:

O Thou who camest from above,
the pure celestial fire to impart
kindle a flame of sacred love
upon the mean altar of my heart.

There let it for thy glory burn
with inextinguishable blaze,
and trembling to its source return,
in humble prayer and fervent praise

Set a fire down in my soul
That I can't contain,
that I can't control
I want more of You
God
I want more of You God

Pray for someone you know who needs their faith to be rekindled. Or for yourself, if that describes you. (It's all of us, at some point in our journey.)

Day Three: Wind

Do any or all of the following:

Think of the following pictures:

A field of cowslips trembling in the spring breeze

A cool wind refreshing your face on a hot day

Some washing flapping on the line

A sail filling and sending a boat in a particular direction

A windmill turning, bringing energy and productivity

The unseen yet natural way in which seeds are spread (eg a dandelion clock)

A tempest shaking dead branches from a tree

A strong wind helping an aeroplane to go faster or a flying bird to conserve its energy

How might these images help you to connect with the work of God through his Spirit?

Read Acts 2:1-8. Try reading it aloud in a different translation from usual, e.g. The Passion Translation. www.biblegateway.com

The sound of the wind is one that we are familiar with. But what might have been different about this wind sound? What effect did it have - on the disciples, and on the people visiting Jerusalem?

What happens when you get wind and fire together?

Do any of the images in the list above connect with the story in Acts 2? Which ones?



Reflect:

La Barque Mystique

(The Mystical Boat)

Odilon Redon (public domain)

Put yourself in the boat in this picture. Who is in the boat with you?

Do you think there is any meaning in the colours used? What sort of atmosphere do you see in the boat?

How can we invite the Holy Spirit to direct the “boats” of our lives?

The story of Saint Brendan tells of how he and fourteen companion monks built a simple coracle. They set

out into the Atlantic and allowed the wild wind of the Spirit to take them wherever it would. “The Voyage of Brendan” writes of the great wonders he and his companions saw and experienced on their journey. What do you think of their willingness to give over their route to the directing of the Holy Spirit? Would we be able to give up our desire to control our own path like this? If we did, how might it glorify God and expand his Kingdom?

Action: *make an origami boat with a piece of A4 paper (there are lots of instructions online, eg the sprucecrafts.com). Write your prayer for the Holy Spirit’s direction on it before you start. Offer it to God by sailing it somewhere - in your washing up bowl, or bath, or perhaps across a pond in your garden!*

Day Four: A Bird

Do any or all of the following

Think: Sydney Carter's song "Bird of Heaven" begins like this:

*"Catch the Bird of Heaven,
Lock Him in a cage of gold;
Look again tomorrow,
And He will be gone..."*

How might this picture relate to our experience of the Holy Spirit?

How might it challenge us as members of the Church in our way of responding to Him?

Look at the birds in the sky. Spend some time watching them. What do you see?

Read: *Galatians 5:1-5, 2 Corinthians 3:17*. How might freedom be a blessing of the Holy Spirit?
How do you see it in evidence on the Day of Pentecost?

Watch a video of a bird sitting on a nest or protecting its young. How might this connect with the picture of the Holy Spirit descending at Jesus' baptism? (Matthew 3:13-17)

Pray the words of one of the following, for yourself, or someone you know, or the world:



*"...And The Word shall last
And the Wild Goose shall fly
Shall fly..."*

*Here I stand,
looking out to sea
And I say a prayer
That the Wild Goose will
come to me..."*

*From "Here I Stand", lyrics
Joanne Hogg ©1990 Word
Music (UK)*

Wild Spirit of the living God,
Fall afresh on me.
Give me the eye of the eagle
So that I can see what is far off
And pray
"Thy kingdom come nearer,
Thy kingdom come more powerfully,
Thy kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven,
Thy kingdom come now." Amen.

(Russ Parker)

Receive: *Be affirmed and encouraged in our present situation by the words of this poem:*

*"Then I saw the wild geese flying in fair formation to their passes in Inchicore
and I knew that these wings would outwear the wings of war
and a man's simple thoughts outlive the loud day's lying.
Don't fear, don't fear, I said to my soul.
The Bedlam of Time is an empty bucket rattles,
'Tis you who will say in the end who best battles.
Only they who fly home to God have flown at all."*

Patrick Kavanagh

Day Five: Helper

Do any or all of the following:

Read: *John 14:15-17*

The word “helper” here could be translated as comforter, counsellor, advocate or encourager. It could also mean “defence attorney”.

It literally means someone who stands beside you and helps you.

Think: What tasks in our world do we routinely seek helpers for? Consider the care sector, teaching and instruction, cleaning, advice, advocacy. Do we seek help from the Holy Spirit as routinely? (Be honest. If you feel it is appropriate at this point, you might want to say sorry to God for your over-independence.)

Respond: Choose something in your house that you rely on for help, e.g. your phone, a walking stick or your spectacles, Alexa, a memo pad or address book. Take stock of how much you rely on it.

Get a sheet of paper and draw round its outline, or take a photo of it and print it out.

Write a prayer around the outline, or around the photo, telling God what help you need from him, and why you are grateful for his help. Ask the Holy Spirit to come and help you.

Read the prayer aloud to God.

This picture of the Holy Spirit as our helper reminds us that he is always by us; this section of the “St Patrick’s Breastplate” Prayer is an aid to locating his help in our lives, a useful tool to assure ourselves that he is walking along with us and to reassure us of his shielding presence. You might want to learn it.

*Christ be with me, Christ within me,
Christ behind me, Christ before me,
Christ beside me, Christ to win me,
Christ to comfort and restore me.*

*Christ beneath me, Christ above me,
Christ in quiet, Christ in danger,
Christ in hearts of all that love me,
Christ in mouth of friend and stranger.*

Pray for all helpers today



“Maesta” (Duccio, 1308-11), depicting Jesus’ farewell discourse in John 14-17.

Notice how the disciples are hanging on the words of Jesus. They *love* listening to him! It is a picture of people thirsty to be taught, helped, counselled. Is this our experience of the Holy Spirit’s help? If not, why not? Talk to God about it.