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BETHANY LUTHERAN CHURCH
ELKHORN, NEBRASKA
JUNE 4, 2006
PASTOR MARK FRY

1 PASTOR MARK FRY: If you have your Bibles out, we
2 are going to get to John 20 here in a minute, but you may
3 notice my little decoration thing up on the altar here.

4 It's a big tin of mints and I want to share these
5 with you.

6 I was talking to Pam, our director of children's
7 ministry, "I was thinking this weekend I want to give
8 everybody a Tic-Tac, Pam."

9 And she said, "You might not want to do that.
10 Little people are going to put those in places they are not
11 supposed to go, in their nose, or they may choke on them."

12 She had the idea to give them these mint patties, so
13 everybody is going to get at least one of these. Give one to
14 every kid and everybody.

15 You don't have to eat it. In fact, I would like you
16 to wait to eat it.

17 We are going to eat them together a little bit
18 later.

19 But the reason I want to do this is because in that
20 story where Jesus comes and breathes on them and they receive
21 the Holy Spirit, I want to wonder about what that smelled
22 like

23 And so go ahead and hit that music, if you want to
24 Brad, while these are being handed out.

25 (Every Breath You Take - By Sting)

1 "Every breath you take
2 And every move you make
3 Every bond you break, every step you take
4 I'll be watching you
5 Every single day
6 And every word you say
7 Every game you play, every night you stay
8 I'll be watching you
9 Oh, can't you see
10 You belong to me
11 How my poor heart aches
12 With every step you take
13 Every move you make
14 Every vow you break
15 Every smile you fake
16 Every claim you stake
17 I'll be watching you."

18
19 Here is where I'm going. If you look closely at
20 John 20, Jesus shows up and he comes through the locked
21 doors.

22 These are guys that are in secret, they are
23 frightened, he comes and he stands among them and he says,
24 "Peace be with you."

25 And as he said this he breathed on them and he said

1 to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit."

2 And here is what I want you to think. What do you
3 suppose that smelled like? What does the breath of Jesus
4 smell like?

5 The skeptic in us is going to say I bet it smelled a
6 little bit like vinegar, because he had just died, and the
7 last sip of anything he had was rancid wine as an anesthetic,
8 he's coming back, is that breath smelling like death?

9 Or is he breathing on them with his last meal, which
10 was lamb and the Passover meal.

11 They came together and they had the Passover feast
12 of lamb, and one of my favorite meals is lamb.

13 I can smell vinegar a mile away. My wife cleans our
14 kitchen floor with it and every time she does it I'm like,
15 "Do you have to use that stuff?"

16 She says, "It's the best product. It really gets
17 that wood floor clean and polished up.

18 So I tolerate the smell, but I wonder what Jesus's
19 breath smells like.

20 It does cleanse, and he's the Lamb of God who takes
21 away the sin of the world

22 But I want to think a little on that this morning
23 with you, and I want to unpack that a little bit, because
24 almost every week of the year, we did a little white ago here
25 during the baptism of Reid, we used the Apostle's Creed.

1 We recite from memory this ancient creed. It's a
2 statement of faith that has been handed down through the
3 ages.

4 And here's my question for you today. We have the
5 Father, who created it all; the Son who did it all; and then
6 we've got the Holy Spirit.

7 And I want you to prayerfully wonder, is that my
8 weakest of the three, the Holy Spirit?

9 Because my contention is it's the one who gets the
10 least attention and maybe is the most frequently
11 misunderstood, the Holy Spirit of God.

12 Because as we look at that Apostle's Creed, it's
13 found in the hymnal, we've watered it down a little bit I
14 think in the part of it about the Apostle's Creed where it
15 says, "I believe in the holy catholic church, the communion
16 of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the
17 body, the life everlasting."

18 We put that on automatic pilot and we just run
19 through that.

20 And as we do that, I think we lose some really
21 awesome teaching that our Lord gives us.

22 But to take the Apostle's Creed literally is to make
23 it into a thing of the past; a document that is dead.

24 But we need to see it as something that God has
25 given us for life.

1 "God the Father almighty, creator of heaven and
2 earth," if we take that literally, if you're like me, you are
3 going to see that and go that sounds like that God did a lot
4 of really cool stuff several hundred million years ago and
5 now he's just on hold.

6 "God the Father almighty, creator of heaven and
7 earth."

8 The earth is millions of years old, he did it then,
9 now he's just in a holding pattern, if we take that
10 literally.

11 And we can do the same thing with the part about
12 Jesus, the second person in the creed.

13 He was conceived by the Holy Spirit, suffered under
14 Pontius Pilate, ascended into heaven, and he'll come back
15 again.

16 It sounds like Jesus was back then, and will be in
17 the future, but isn't now, if we take that literally.

18 So the God the Father almighty did all this really
19 cool stuff way back when.

20 Jesus did all this really cool stuff way back when,
21 and he's coming again, but who is here now and where is he
22 now, if we take that literally.

23 Then if we go on to the third person of the creed,
24 we see that, and it has all that holy catholic church,
25 communion of saints, forgiveness of sins, resurrection of the

1 body, and life everlasting.

2 I can't tell you how many people come up to me and
3 they go, "The first time I visited your church, I was a
4 little gun shy because I thought you were a Catholic church?"

5 I said, "Really? Tell me more about that."

6 They go, "Well, you say it every week. The holy
7 catholic church."

8 And it's like, "We are not that kind of Catholic."

9 They go, "What is that kind of catholic?"

10 I try to explain to them, the upper case Catholic is
11 the Roman Catholic, and the lower case catholic is an ancient
12 word that means universal. It's just Christian church.

13 Isn't that interesting, we can kind of get hung up
14 on words, and taken literally we could make the creed a creed
15 of distance and the past, and not the present and the
16 presence.

17 I think that happens a lot, but I also believe that
18 the Holy Spirit holds things together and at the same time
19 blows things apart in this creative tension that we see in
20 the scriptures, that we experience in our own lives

21 And that's my theme today, is to look on this
22 Pentecost, the gift of the Holy Spirit.

23 It just didn't happen two thousand years ago and now
24 it's just off sleeping somewhere waiting to come back again
25 in forty days or whatever.

1 It's here right now with every breath we take. I'm
2 watching you and I want to flow into your life.

3 I want you to receive me and I want you to give me
4 away.

5 That's the Holy Spirit and that's where we are going
6 today.

7 The creed is meant to bind us together and at the
8 same time keep us informed, but also not unenthused. We need
9 to be filled with the spirit constantly.

10 So we are going to do a little Bible study this
11 morning.

12 You can stay there in John 20 if you want, but I
13 want you to come back to that.

14 There is this fascinating word in the Hebrew
15 language, it's called *rauch*, and I've written it in italics
16 there.

17 That's the Hebrew word that God uses for spirit, and
18 it's all over the pages of the Bible, and we are going to see
19 some of the uses of that together.

20 But I want to set that in context. It goes all the
21 way from Genesis 1 to Revelation 21.

22 But I want to set it in the context of my devotional
23 this past week from Oswald Chambers.

24 I like to read in the morning "My Utmost For His
25 Highest".

1 It's one of my spiritual disciplines I do, and he
2 writes this about this verse that has sometimes troubled
3 Christians.

4 First Thessalonians 5:17. "Pray without ceasing."
5 And people have taken that literally, too, and then they go I
6 can't do that, because I get tired. On a good day I can only
7 pray for ten minutes, five minutes, an hour, whatever, and
8 Paul, man, he sets the bar so high, "Pray without ceasing,"
9 how am I going to do it? I will never measure up.

10 This is what Pastor Chambers says about that verse.
11 He says, "Our thinking about prayer, whether right or wrong,
12 is based on our own mental conception of it.

13 "The correct concept is to think of prayer as the
14 breath in our lungs and the blood from our hearts.

15 "Our blood flows and our breathing continues without
16 ceasing.

17 "We are not even conscious of it, but it never
18 stops, and we are not always conscious of Jesus keeping us in
19 perfect oneness with God, but if we are obeying him he always
20 is.

21 "Prayer is not an exercise; it is the life of a
22 saint.

23 "Beware of practicing anything that stops the
24 offering up of prayer.

25 "When Paul writes pray without ceasing, maintain the

1 child-like habit of offering up prayer in your heart to God
2 all the time."

3 I really like that. I really like that. That's
4 really what we are doing.

5 We are breathing prayers, but we don't understand.
6 Sometimes we are like I'm not in my prayer mode.

7 I don't have my eyes closed out on the back of my
8 deck laying prostrate on the ground, so I must not be praying.

9 Pray without ceasing means to just understand that
10 every breath we take is coming from God and going back to
11 God. He's everywhere and He's in everything.

12 One of my favorite stories is Pastor Wenda's notion,
13 she was one of those kids that was raised in the church as a
14 young person.

15 Her mom and dad were faithful Christian people.
16 They brought these four little blond girls to church and they
17 were there every week. It was just who they were.

18 And she tells the story, as a little kid, I don't
19 know how old she was, but that was back in the days when the
20 kids didn't come up for communion blessings; they just kind
21 of hung back.

22 And so the mom and dad would get up, my mother and
23 father-in-law, and they would get communion and they would
24 come back to the seat and the girls had been back there
25 playing with crayons or whatever it was, and then they would

1 go, "What is that smell, mommy?"

2 And Wenda's mom just said, "That's the Holy Spirit."

3 I'm so thankful for that metaphor, because the
4 doubting Thomas in us says that's not the Holy Spirit; that's
5 just that wine that she got when she went up to the front of
6 the church.

7 Her mom said, "That's the Holy Spirit."

8 So I wouldn't be surprised if that little teaching
9 didn't then percolate in Wenda's little soul and spirit all
10 those years, "Oh, that's what that is, and I need to smell
11 that often."

12 But, you see, it's in the breath we breathe. It's
13 in the smells we smell. It's in the way that our body aroma
14 is transmitted to other people.

15 And what we tend to do is we make these sacred and
16 secular distinctions that are not helpful.

17 No, it's just wine.

18 That's the Holy Spirit.

19 Well, that's my Monday through Saturday day. This
20 is my Sunday.

21 No. Every breath we take. It's sacred. It's the
22 very gift that God has given us.

23 And that's why we need to look at the scriptures to
24 understand that, because you see what Jesus is doing in
25 John 20 is he's touching all of their senses.

1 He comes and he breathes on them and they receive
2 the Holy Spirit.

3 And right in the next verse is Thomas, he's the
4 doubter, he says okay, I wasn't there, I'm not going to
5 believe it unless I touch it and see it for myself.

6 So what does Jesus do? A few verses later he comes
7 back. He says all right, Thomas, give it your best shot.
8 Here it is. Here are the holes in my hand and the hole in my
9 side. Place your hands here.

10 And he does and he goes, "Lord, I believe now, too.
11 Help thou my unbelief."

12 Jesus uses all five senses. The smell, the taste,
13 the touch, the sight, the hearing.

14 That's how real he is, and so we need to look at
15 that Biblically.

16 Have you smelled that smell? It would be easy to
17 think he just smelled horrible, he just died, and the smell
18 of death permeates our world, but it doesn't have to
19 penetrate us, if we are understanding a healthy biblical
20 concept.

21 Let's jump right into it, Genesis 1:1, the very
22 first verse of the Bible, this fascinating word *rauch*
23 appears.

24 It's in Genesis 1:2. "In the beginning when God
25 created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless

1 void and darkness covered the base of the deep while the wind
2 from God swept over the face of the waters."

3 That word wind from God is also translated as Spirit
4 of God.

5 If you've got really good eyesight you can see at
6 the bottom of your little footnote, it says "while the spirit
7 of God" or "while a mighty wind hovered over the creation."

8 That's that Hebrew word of rauch. It was there in
9 the very beginning. It's never not existed.

10 It wasn't born on Pentecost. The Spirit of God has
11 always been available and present with God's people.

12 We see it right again in the second chapter, Genesis
13 2:7, next page, page two, Genesis 2:7.

14 "Then the Lord God formed man from the dust of the
15 ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life."

16 If you were a Hebrew scholar you would notice that
17 that is the same exact word as wind of God, breath of life,
18 rauch.

19 It's never not been there. It has always been with
20 Reid in the gift of life that he was given through his mommy
21 and daddy, but now we are celebrating the Spirit coming into
22 his life through the tradition and the gift of grace that we
23 believe of communion and Holy Spirit in baptism.

24 It's the wind of God. It's not about us; it's about
25 Jesus, like the song says.

1 We are sorry, Lord, for the things we've made it.
2 We have separated out the sacred and the secular and it
3 hasn't been helpful.

4 We see it again in Genesis 8:1. I love this
5 wonderful story of Noah and his family. They are saved
6 through water and wind.

7 Notice Genesis 8:1. "But God remembered Noah and
8 all the wild animals and all the domestic animals that were
9 with him in the ark. God made a wind blow over the earth and
10 the water subsided."

11 The same exact Hebrew word. Wind; spirit; rauch.
12 It's always been there.

13 It's always protecting and sustaining and delivering
14 God's people.

15 It's breathing into their very soul. It doesn't
16 take vacation. It's always there.

17 We see it again in Exodus 14, the wonderful story of
18 Moses and his people being delivered.

19 Exodus 14, Verse 21. It's on page 62 of my Bible.
20 "Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea and the Lord
21 drove the sea back by a strong east wind all night long and
22 turned the sea into dry land and the waters were divided."

23 Same exact Hebrew word, the rauch, the Spirit of the
24 Lord separated the water, delivered Noah and his family, and
25 delivers Moses and his family, it delivers the Swartzbaugh

1 family, it delivers all of our families, by the Spirit of
2 God.

3 It has never taken a vacation. It's always there.
4 It's always working, God's grace and God's forgiveness and
5 God's reconciliation.

6 It doesn't leave. It's there, as near as the breath
7 we breathe.

8 We see it in the prophets. We see it in Jonah.
9 He's hard to find, he's a skinny little book in the back of
10 the Old Testament, I've got him on page 884, this same
11 concept of the breath of life, of the wind of God, of the
12 Holy Spirit that is greater than we are, and we don't always
13 go in the direction of it.

14 We see this in Jonah's story. Jonah 1, Verse 4.
15 Jonah has just been told by God to go to Blair, and he says
16 I'm not going to Blair; I'm going to Gretna.

17 So he goes to Gretna and all of a sudden he's in
18 this ship and the Lord hurled a great wind, his rauch, his
19 mighty Spirit upon the sea.

20 Such a mighty storm came upon the sea that the ship
21 threatened to break up.

22 What happens in the story is Jonah is thinking God
23 must be doing this because of me, throw me overboard, and
24 they do.

25 When we go in the wrong direction, the Spirit brings

1 us back.

2 He's thrown overboard, the fish eats him up, he's
3 then vomited onto the dry land and he's like okay, I better
4 go to Blair after all.

5 So he heads to Nineveh, but he still hasn't had his
6 heart changed.

7 What he does is he preaches against that wonderful
8 city in the third and fourth chapter.

9 And Jonah, he's like okay, God changes his mind, and
10 he wants to blow his spirit of redemption on all kinds of
11 people and Jonah is very displeased, Chapter 4, Verse 1.

12 So what he does is he goes outside the city in Verse
13 5, he sits down, he makes a booth for himself, and he sat
14 under the shade of this little tree and he wanted to see
15 everybody just get fried by the wrath of God.

16 What happens? Well, the Spirit of the Lord comes
17 back, Verse 8.

18 "When the sun rose God prepared a sultry east wind,"
19 same exact Hebrew word as Spirit of the Lord, wind of God,
20 and that sultry east wind comes and beats down on the head of
21 Jonah so that he was faint and asked that he might die.

22 He said it's better for me to die than to live, and
23 then God is like what is your deal?

24 You don't want me to blow grace and forgiveness to
25 these people who have repented? Who do you think you are?

1 And the story miraculously and wondrously ends, but
2 the Spirit has always been there.

3 It's there in the book of Isaiah. Isaiah 11, I have
4 it on page 654, Isaiah 11, Verse 1.

5 "A shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse and
6 branches shall grow out of his roots. The spirit of the lord
7 shall rest on him."

8 This is that same word, the wind of the Lord, "The
9 spirit of the Lord, the spirit of wisdom and understanding,
10 the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and
11 the fear of the lord. His delight shall be in the fear of
12 the Lord."

13 It's the same exact Hebrew word, rauch. It blows
14 into this one who will come from the stump of Jesse, who we
15 will come to realize is Jesus.

16 And now you see what we see in John is he's sharing
17 it. He's breathing it on all of his disciples.

18 We see it in the story of Pentecost, which is the
19 story of the birth of the Christian church in the Book of
20 Acts, Second Chapter.

21 The wonderful story of the Spirit being recognized
22 in this dramatic way.

23 Acts 2, "When the day of Pentecost came, suddenly
24 from heaven there came the sound of a rush of a violent
25 wind," the rauch of God shakes things loose, and everybody

1 all of a sudden starts speaking in other languages, but
2 they're understanding each other.

3 And the Spirit gets ahold of them and of course the
4 doubters, who would say that's not the Holy Spirit, that's
5 just wine, they say these people must be drunk.

6 But Peter says they aren't drunk. This is the
7 Spirit, just as it was foretold. The rush of a violent wind.

8 God is greater than we are. We tend to think of him
9 just as this controllable little force.

10 We do not harness the wind. Hopefully we utilize
11 it, but we can't stop it.

12 When Jesus talked to Nicodemus about being born
13 again, he says it comes through the wind, and if you think
14 you are going to catch the wind, good luck.

15 We can utilize it, but we are never going to capture
16 it, we are never going to control it.

17 In the very last book of the Bible, the Book of
18 Revelation, we see this also coming into the words.

19 Revelation 3:20, "Listen, I'm standing at the door
20 knocking. If you hear my voice and open the door, I will
21 come to you and eat with you and you with me."

22 This is so prophetic, because this is just what
23 happened in John 20.

24 Jesus wants in, but they didn't let him in. They
25 locked the doors, and he comes in anyway in John 20.

1 But he says you need to let the Spirit into your
2 life.

3 "I will come to you and eat with you and you with
4 me. For the one who conquers I will give a place with me on
5 my throne, just as I myself conquered and sat down with my
6 Father on his throne. Let anyone who has an ear listen to
7 what the Spirit is saying to the churches."

8 It's not what anybody human is saying to the
9 churches. What is the Spirit saying to us?

10 Go and make disciples. Be reconciled. What is the
11 Spirit saying? Go NUTS. Never Under Estimate The Spirit.
12 Go NUTS. Go crazy.

13 The creed didn't end the Holy Spirit and it didn't
14 begin it. It's not contained in a creed.

15 We need to let it into our hearts. We need to let
16 it flow and blow.

17 Thank you, Lord. Thank you, Jesus, for coming
18 through our shut doors, the vault that we've made our hearts
19 to be, our houses to be. Thank you, Lord, for breathing new
20 life into us.

21 Last weekend between Wenda and I had we had four
22 weddings. It was fantastic.

23 I had a rehearsal on Thursday and a wedding on
24 Saturday.

25 She had two rehearsals on Thursday, two weddings on

1 Friday, and another wedding on Sunday.

2 So we were like all over the city of Omaha with
3 weddings and graduations just all over the place. It was
4 fantastic.

5 The challenge of that is I drive an older car. I
6 drive a 1991 190 Mercedes.

7 I just had fixed three weeks ago, oil changed, tuned
8 up the air conditioner.

9 I had air coming out of those front two vents, it
10 was just ice cold, it was beautiful.

11 But the problem was the two vents on the side were
12 kicking out heat and they would not shut.

13 I literally could be driving down the road and I had
14 to have my window open and the air on trying to blow the hot
15 air out of that one side

16 And when I would just move the vent it almost burned
17 my hand, it was that hot

18 And the bad thing of it was the faster you drove the
19 hotter it was.

20 Wenda and I are running around. She's wearing a
21 suit. She told me one day she took four showers.

22 She was going downtown, coming back, she preached
23 down in Omaha, came back, and she has this cold air in the
24 middle.

25 So when we drive, we look like young lovers. I'm

1 driving with my head in the middle and she's over on the
2 other side trying to get a little bit of that cold air on her
3 face, and that's not the way I like to roll. I like to be
4 over a little bit.

5 Finally on Monday I took the car back to my German
6 mechanic. I said, "There's something wrong with it."

7 He said, "Just bring it in and we'll look at it."

8 \$98 later there was a vacuum hose problem or
9 whatever, but now we have cold air, thank the Lord in time to
10 go to Kearney and back or she would have really been filled
11 with the Spirit when we got out there, she would have been
12 burning up, and who knows what would have happened at the
13 Thursday night meet the candidates thing.

14 But we tend as Americans to prefer air conditioning,
15 don't we?

16 Because when we open the windows, we don't know what
17 is going to come in

18 Some of it is going to be unpleasant. It might have
19 some dirt in it.

20 It may have some humidity in it. It may have some
21 stink in it.

22 But I'm drawn by that temptation of just closing
23 everything and hitting all the buttons and being impenetrable
24 as I ponder Holy Spirit, because I know myself pretty well
25 and I like to be comfortable.

1 And I like to comfort those that are afflicted, but
2 I don't like to afflict those that are comfortable.

3 That's the Spirit's job, and he's asking us, I
4 think, to open the windows a little bit and to breathe it in
5 and breath it out.

6 I want to close with a little bit of a breathing
7 exercise for you.

8 So if you have been a good steward and you have kept
9 your mint, go ahead and eat it.

10 If you have not, you're also a good steward and I'm
11 not sitting in judgment of you.

12 But if you have eaten that mint, I want you to enjoy
13 it, and Brad is going to play some soft piano music, and I
14 want to read to you a little devotional that has been very
15 helpful for me.

16 It uses the metaphor of a coffee cup, of being
17 filled up in order to be released.

18 The author says, "I remember how I used to begin any
19 program of spiritual growth.

20 "I would be intent on doing well and I would work
21 real hard at it, often feeling concerned or even anxious
22 because I wanted to do it right and make a lot of progress.

23 "I felt like it all depended on me as to whether or
24 not I would grow.

25 "I didn't realize that I needed the vibrant stream

1 of divine life moving through me in order to be truly
2 transformed.

3 "This attitude gradually changed because of an
4 experience I had on a retreat one time.

5 "I fell into a deep slump during that time and I
6 could not get myself to pray and I didn't seem like I was
7 connecting with God at all.

8 "This complete loss of spiritual control allowed me
9 to see very painfully that my ego had been trying to control
10 my inner journey.

11 "This experience taught me that I am simply an empty
12 cup until I'm filled with the loving energy of a loving God.

13 "Once I became aware of this, I felt much more
14 strength and even serenity about my own spiritual journey.

15 "Personal growth does take some effort on my part.
16 I do need to give myself over to the process, but I can't
17 force growth to happen.

18 "This is God's realm of doing. I can yearn to be
19 transformed. I can be faithful to my daily meditation, but
20 as long as I'm trying to go it alone, I will simply stumble
21 along fruitlessly.

22 "A little bit like the woman who touched the hem of
23 Jesus's garment and received the healing power of his Spirit,
24 I need to receive the life-changing energy of the divine love
25 in my life every day."

1 I share that with you and now I want you to go ahead
2 and eat your mint.

3 We are going to dim the lights a little and Brad is
4 going to play the music.

5 We have been having some fun with this as a staff.
6 What I want you to do is in your spirit think of this as your
7 breathing prayer.

8 As you're breathing in, I want you to think, your
9 power.

10 Say that after me. Your power. That's for
11 inhaling, your power.

12 As we breathe out, we will think, moving through me.
13 Say that after me. Moving through me.

14 Your power, inhale. Moving through me, as we
15 exhale.

16 Thank you, Lord Jesus, for your power that moves
17 through us. As you pause, I invite you to stay in that
18 rhythm of your power, Lord, moving through us.

19 You could even feel the pulse in your neck or your
20 wrist. That's the Holy Spirit.

21 That's the Holy Spirit of God living in you, moving
22 in you.

23 See that Spirit sustaining your life and bringing
24 energy for you to grow, not that you must force that to
25 happen, but it's God's Spirit and power moving in us.