

March 12, 2017: Lent 2: Wind



In the beginning, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, then a wind from God swept over the face of the waters, and creation began. After 40 days and 40 nights of rain God caused a wind to pass over the earth, and the water subsided. The wind moved so Noah and his family could exit the ark and live on the land once more.

Moses stretched out his hand over the sea; and the LORD swept the sea back by a strong east wind all night and turned the sea into dry land, so the waters were divided. The wind moved so the people of Israel could cross the Red Sea and be delivered from the Egyptian army.

When the valley was filled with dry bones God came from the four winds and breathed new life on them so that they might live once more. The wind moved so God could restore new life to that which was dead.

Throughout the Hebrew Scriptures God comes in the wind, speaks in the wind, saves through the wind, brings change through the wind, brings life through...the wind.

There is power in the wind.

In our Gospel lesson this morning, as Jesus speaks with Nicodemus, we hear again about the power of God's wind. The Pharisees, which Nicodemus was a part, considered themselves to be the holiest and best people in the country. They entered a sacred brotherhood by making a pledge before three witnesses that they would spend all of their lives observing every detail of the Jewish law. The Pharisees believed the Torah laws to be the perfect and inerrant word of God, and that the law contained everything that a person needed to know for the living of a righteous and godly life. From the Law, the scribes and scholars, rabbis and teachers had extracted thousands of regulations to cover every conceivable situation, and the Pharisees spent their lives trying to keep them.

And then there was Jesus, who was always getting himself into trouble with the Pharisees for violating these regulations and rules. In their view he was not only living an unrighteous life himself but he was leading hundreds of poorly educated, impressionable people astray. Eventually these religious leaders would plot his death.

But Nicodemus was different. There was something about Jesus' teaching that resonated with him. Nicodemus came to Jesus in the darkness, perhaps afraid of the scorn of the other Pharisees, or perhaps from the darkness of his own life. Even though he had been pursuing the perfection of the Law, perhaps there was still something missing. Perhaps Nicodemus was experiencing his own wilderness looking for peace, joy and life that he could not find under the stringent Laws. SO, with this on his mind and a deep yearning of in his heart, Nicodemus secretly breaks rank with his Pharisee colleagues and comes to Jesus.

The first thing Jesus tells him is that he must have another mode for living. He needs to be born from above. Nicodemus does not question whether or not he wants this new birth... he questions the possibility of how it can happen. He asks "what do I have to do? Climb back into my mother's womb?" Jesus responds "No", it is not a physical birth but a spiritual one. The only way you can fully understand what God's intention for life is all about is to live into God's divine will, love and power, kingdom living rather than simple law abiding.

After a life of rules and Laws, of do's and don'ts, this Spirit living was foreign to him... He wants to know how... what are the rules of this kind of life?

Instead of answers, Jesus invites him to EXPERIENCE the WIND.

I love that Jesus takes these complex theological concepts, being born again, and the kingdom of God, and explains them with ordinary things of life.

Jesus teaches Nicodemus that the Spirit of God has similar qualities and mysteries of wind. It has power and it has life. You do not have to understand its origin or its destination in order to be caught up in it...but you have a choice to be caught up in it... or not.

When we hear Jesus say the famous verse "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life." We immediately think of life beyond death. But eternal life, like the kingdom of God is not about quantity it is about quality. It is not about a destination after life, it is a way of living in this life and then, beyond it. It is about choosing to be caught up in the wind, in the Spirit of God, right here and right now.

I can't pinpoint a particular moment when eternal life began for me. Instead there have been many formative moments in which I chose to open the door to my heart and allow the wind/breath/Spirit of God to rush through me. To this day, I remember the VBS songs from my childhood that taught me about the love of God that grows as you Share a Little Bit of Your Love. I remember summer camps, singing songs around the fire, hiking through the woods, reading the morning devotionals in the outdoor chapel, taking time to reflect on the beauty of creation and applying the message of scripture to my own life. I remember being on a youth retreat and going for a walk with a new friend I just met, and listening as she divulged and processed her emotions about her parents kicking her out of the house because she had come out of the closet. I didn't have the words she needed to hear, but I prayed fervently for God to speak through me and bring her comfort.

In each of these moments, I chose to open myself to the Spirit of God, to be caught up in and experience the WIND, the grace and the power of God. I chose to trust in something I did not understand. I could not explain where the amazing feeling of comfort, wholeness and purpose came from. I can't tell you that I knew it would carry me into ministry. All I can tell you is that over and over again throughout my life the Spirit blows...filling me and sending me and empowering me...to live a life of service.

You know, we are never told what that night visit meant for Nicodemus. We don't know if he opened his heart to the wind or not. But we hear of him two more times in the Gospel of John. The next time, Jesus has been brought before the Sanhedrin, and Nick reminds his colleagues that the law requires that a person be heard before being judged (John 7:50-51), he demands a just hearing of Jesus "crimes" before judgement. And the last we hear of Nicodemus, is after the crucifixion, as he accompanies Joseph of Arimathea in taking Jesus' body, preparing it for burial, and laying it to rest in the tomb. Clearly, the impact of the Wind on Nicodemus' life brings about a new strength; for this Pharisee, who had first come to Jesus by night, now has strength to walk with him in the light of day.

My friends, there is a wind blowing around us. It is the grace of God's love and power. The very breath of the Almighty God seeking to lift you and I into eternal life, here and now.

The Spirit of God has power and life. You don't need to understand its origin or know its destination in order to be caught up in it.

But the choice is ours...will we let go? Will we let Christ in? Will we follow the winds of change?

The Spirit Winds are blowing this Lent...can you feel it? There is power in the wind!