

Catching the Wind
John 14:15-17, 25-27
Galatians 5:16-23
John J. Yonker

3-7-04
First Christian Church
Columbia, Missouri

How about ending the service early and going out to the park to fly a kite this morning? Don't you think today would be a great day to fly a kite?

I was driving down Nifong not too long ago and saw a man with a couple of kids flying a kite in the Mill Creek Elementary School yard. It brought back memories of the day that my father made a kite for my brothers and me. It was in the days before suits came back from the cleaners in plastic, they were returned in brown paper sacks. We asked Dad to make a kite for us; he cut and glued some of that thin brown paper onto a couple of sticks he found in the back yard and tied together. We tied a ball of string on it and took it up to the park by our grade school and got it up into the wind. And it began to soar up into the sky! We have a photograph somewhere my brothers and I and my Dad holding up that home-made kite. What fun it was!

The first of March is a good time to fly kites. And it is a good time to hoist up our sails and our souls and catch the wind of the Holy Spirit. For that is the issue before us today:

What about the Holy Spirit? How do we understand the spirit of God?
How does the Holy Spirit communicate with us?

Let's take a look in Bible. There we see that catching the spirit is like catching the wind!

In the Hebrew language of the Old Testament the spirit is the *ruach* of God. It is the wind, breath, or the life of God which created the world and gave life to all living things. The *ruach* of God is not something separate from God, as though it could be detached from God, like jacking up a car and removing the tires. The *ruach* is God, the living impact of God here and now. It is a feminine noun, by the way, in the Hebrew language. She gave life and wisdom, she inspired prophesy, and hope and courage. The spirit of God is like the wind, the energy of God.

And so it is in the New Testament. According to the Greek language of the New Testament, the spirit is the *pneuma* of God. It is the wind. Like the *ruach*, the spirit breathes life into us, it inspires gifts, calls us to hope, helps us in our weakness, leads us into truth. And in the ages since Jesus lived and died on this earth, the spirit always lead us back to Jesus, it reminds of us who he was, how he lived, and it gives us power to live "in Christ."

We hear about the dynamic power of the divine spirit from the beginning of

the Old Testament, and witness the work of the Holy Spirit in the New Testament. But it was not until the 3rd century that understanding of the Holy Spirit defined in the doctrine of the Holy Trinity began to be worked out.

In the west, a man named Tertullian tried to explain how God could be one yet also be revealed in three distinct ways. He used the Latin word “personae” to describe how God was revealed in a “trinitas”, three successive “modes” or “manifestations.” He was not talking about God as three separate persons with distinct personalities like John, Ken and Amy Kay, all contained in a single person. He was thinking about three manifestations, or three roles, or three dispensations of the same single divine reality.

In the east others in orthodox churches offered still others explanations. They emphasized the single mysterious essence of God the Creator shining forth in divine energy in Jesus Christ, and the presence of the Holy Spirit. One of their church leaders described it with these words;

Likewise we believe also in one Holy Spirit, the Lord and giver of life, which proceeds from the Father and rests on the Son. . . con-substantial and co-eternal. . . existing and addressed along with the Father and the Son; uncreated. . . deifying not deified; filling, not filled; shared in, not sharing in; sanctifying, not sanctified; the intercessor, receiving the supplications of all; in all things like to the Father and the Son; proceeding from the Father and communicated through the Son. . .ⁱ

On and on he goes for about half a page, trying to explain how the Holy Spirit is related to the Creator God and Son Jesus Christ. And it is all very hard to understand.

And in the Middle Ages and into the modern period, Christians have struggled with the meaning of the Holy Spirit as it related to God the Father/Creator and Jesus the Son of God. And it remains for many Christians a mystery forever, and for others a source of confusion.

What is Holy Spirit? Well, I just think about the wind! It is the wind, the breath, the life, the energy of the living God. And whoever would live in the Holy Spirit should try to catch the wind.

But who in the world can catch the wind? Nobody! Remember the story of Nicodemus’ conversation with Jesus reported in the 3rd chapter of the gospel of John. Jesus told Nicodemus that he needed to be born of the spirit, and the man asked how it could be done. Jesus replied that the spirit is like the wind, it blows where it wills, and we hear the sound of it, but we do not know where it comes from and where it goes. So it is true!

We Christians would do well to remember that truth – we do not have a corner on the market of the spirit of God. As the apostle Paul told the Greeks that God has never been left without a witness among all the nations, so the peoples of the world have encountered and continue to encounter the spirit of God moving among them.

Among the Native Americans, in the Ogalala Sioux there lived a man named Black Elk who understood the spirit's reality.

We should understand well that all things are the works of the Great Spirit. We should know that He is within all things: the trees, the grasses, the rivers, the mountains, and all the four-legged animals, and the winged peoples: and even more important, we should understand that he is also above all these things and peoples. When we do understand all this deeply in our hearts, then we will fear, and love, and know the Great Spirit, and then we will be and act and live as He intends."

And the great Mahatma Gandhi knew the spirit's reality.

God is not some person outside ourselves or away from the universe. He pervades everything . . . hears everything and reads our inmost thoughts. He abides in our hearts and is nearer to us than the nails on our fingers.

He is the all-pervading, all-powerful spirit. Anyone who hears him in his heart has accession of a marvelous force or energy, comparable in its results to physical forces like steam or electricity but much more subtle.ⁱⁱ

We would do well to remain humble in the seeking the reality of the spirit of God.

What about this Holy Spirit business? What does the spirit have to do with us?

Remember the old Geritol commercials on TV? Are you tired and run down? Do you drag out of bed in the morning and drag through the day? Are you worn out in the evening and can't do anything after supper but doze in your lazy boy? You need Geritol! It'll pep you up! It'll get you going! It'll give you energy! Well, that may not be exactly how it went, but that's the spirit. That's the work of the spirit!

The spirit gives us life.
The spirit energizes us we are run down.
The spirit helps us to pray when we don't know what to say.

And in Christian experience, the spirit gives us life in Christ. The spirit

always leads us back to Jesus. That was the promise of Jesus to the disciples in the Upper Room on the night before his death.

“I have said these things to you while I am still with you. But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you.”

Through conscience, the words of friends and the wisdom of the Christian community, through the inspirations of prayer and the words of scripture and reflection on our own experience, the Spirit urges, prods, nudges, sometimes convicts and convinces but never coerces us to lift out souls into the wind of God and soar like Christ.

E. Stanley Jones, well-known Methodist minister and missionary of a former generation, once said,

“I challenge anyone anywhere to expose his inner life to Jesus Christ in repentance and faith and obedience, and I will tell you what will happen . . . such a person will be changed . . . profoundly changed.”

What happens when we expose ourselves to the spirit of Christ?
What happens when we meditate upon the life of Christ? When we ponder the life of Christ? When we try to emulate the life of Christ?

We begin to grow into the image of Christ. We begin to grow fruits of the spirit . . . love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, gentleness, and self-control.

Peter Ainslee was a Disciples of Christ minister who lived at the beginning of the 20th century. He was a great preacher of the gospel and champion of the cause of Christian unity who exposed his life to the spirit of Christ. In a little book he wrote about the life of the spirit and told the story.

I found in my cellar a pile of flower bulbs, looking like a quarter peck of onions. They appeared to be dried up and dead, but I gave them a chance with good, rich soil, and balmy air, and the fruit of those bulbs were beautiful blossoms of red, white, pink and purple in exquisite shades. Years ago on a visit to the country a friend showed me a handful of apple grafts, looking like little sticks that any boy might pick up around the yard; but those grafts were put onto a living stock and, after some years, I visited my friend in the country again, and I saw the fruit of those grafts in luscious red apples.

Here we are, perhaps not very attractive looking and carrying ourselves dispositions which, at times, are not very commendable. Somehow we find ourselves asking the questions; Are we of any value? Can anything

be made of us? Yes, we are of great value and the finest thing in the world can be made of us.

If we expose ourselves to the spirit of the holy! If we lift our sails and catch the wind of the holy one!

I was running on the street the other morning. Correction; I should say I was chugging on the street the other morning. The weather guessers said it was going to be windy that day but when I headed up the street I did not feel it. I did notice, however, that I flew up the hill without a huff or a puff, and I thought, "This is a piece of cake." But when I turned around and headed for home, it hit me smack in the face. Then began the struggle against the wind, and I was huffing and puffing all the way back down the hill. What a difference the wind makes!

Have you been soaring lately? Have you been sailing lately? Have you been lifting your souls into the wind lately? Have you exposed your spirit to the spirit of Christ lately?

Hoist your sail! Lift your soul into the wind of God's spirit and see what great things can happen!

ⁱ p. 84, Alastair I.C. Heron, *The Holy Spirit: The Holy Spirit in the Bible, the History of Christian Thought, and recent Theology*. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1983

ⁱⁱ p.32, *The Way to God*, M.K. Gandhi, Berkeley, California: Berkeley Hill Books, 1999.