

I loved the wind this week. I love how it whips everything up—my hair, the flock of turkeys in our field, my vestments as I was walking outside the church on Wednesday before the service, the trees...And even though it knocked over my mailbox, it felt amazing to be a part of it all. I felt very alive; energized.

Jesus says we must be born of water and the Spirit. Jesus uses the word Ruach when he's talking about God's Spirit with Nicodemus in the gospel this morning. Ruach literally means wind, but it's often used to describe the Spirit of God that ***blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it will go.***

Jesus lived a life filled with God's holy wind, God's breath. He lived with an aliveness that had never been seen before—he always seemed to be present with those he had conversations with—not thinking about the past, or talking about the future.

The Spirit formed the power that set him free. To follow him was indeed to discover new life, living life however—and in whatever form-- God brought it to him.

The Spirit walks with us through our lives too, animating us, giving us direction-- but the people of God in Jesus' time had become more concerned with following the law. The Pharisees had been shepherding the people of God mostly through enforcement of the law, not through individuals led by the Spirit. People led by the Spirit can be difficult to control.

But while the Spirit has its roots in the law, but is not confined to it. The Spirit of God blows where it chooses.

That can be inconvenient for a power structure that relies on conformity.

"Jesus said, "Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit. What is born of the flesh is flesh, and

what is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not be astonished that I said to you, 'You must be born from above.'

Born of water and the spirit. Some theologians have thought that the reference to water in this passage refers to our Baptism, and spirit to the Holy Spirit coming at Pentecost. Perhaps they are right. Perhaps Jesus was speaking about something in the future. But these theologians are predicating their words on post-resurrection theology.

But other theologians disagree. They point out that Jesus didn't spend a lot of time during his ministry talking about the future—until the very end. Throughout most of his ministry, Jesus was usually more concerned with the here and now.

Born of water and the spirit. This is traditional Hebrew talk. Jesus was Hebrew through and through and steeped in that culture. Hebrews were earthy. To a good Jew, life and living were a great blessing from God.

So let's look at this phrase with Jesus' Jewish eyes. First, we have the phrase : "Born of water." The birth of every baby involves the mother's water breaking. So we are all born of water.

Second, we have Spirit.

I was taught by a professor of ancient Hebrew tradition that to a Jew there must be 3 things present at every baby's conception. There is the male, there is the female, and there is the Holy Spirit. All 3 must be present to create a baby. The two parents create the physical form, and the Holy Spirit breathes life into it. That breath of God they call *Nephesh*.

Nephesh means "to animate— to make vital", to make physically ALIVE.

Jesus seems to be astonished that Nicodemus, an expert in Hebraic law, a Pharisee—doesn't know this. "Are you a teacher of Israel, and yet you do not understand these things?"

So we have the waters to protect and hold us until we are born, and then we have the Spirit taking over; animating us, guiding us by pushing us to places with its “breath”. And we will never know what’s coming—but need to be ready to grab it when it comes.

Let me tell you about a dream I had.

I was at in a church—not one I have ever seen, but definitely a church. A service had started and I wasn’t there. I hurried in to see what was going on.

As I walked in I realized everyone was having communion, and a young woman was giving out the bread, saying “the Body of Christ”--- but she was giving people the teeniest of crumbs, barely enough to pick up in their fingers. And they were all dutifully taking these tiny crumbs. I looked over and saw a basket full of loaves of bread—stacked to the brim, and I picked it up and handed it to her. “You need to give out all the bread, not just crumbs,” I told her.

“Oh, OK.” she said. Interesting dream.

Do we sometimes feel like those people at the altar rail, contenting ourselves with crumbs of God. But we are supposed to eat the entire feast—there is never any need for us to survive on crumbs. We can have all of God that we need or want. We don’t have to ration it.

I felt that God was telling me through this dream that he wanted me to eat my full of God, and to make sure others had the chance to do the same. To – metaphorically--get outside when the wind is whipping, and stand in the Ruach- the wind of God.

But remember, this wind is unpredictable. It can hold you up, but it can also carry you to places you didn’t expect. So be ready.

The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit." Amen.