Where’re The Spirit May Blow

Let us pray. Living God, help us this day to hear your holy Word that we may truly understand; that, understanding, we may believe, and, believing, we may follow in all faithfulness, seeking your honor and glory in all that we do; through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Our scripture reading today comes from Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians, chapter 12, verses 4 through 11. Listen for the Word of the Lord: *“****4****Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit;****5****and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord;****6****and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone.****7****To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.****8****To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit,****9****to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit,****10****to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the discernment of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues.****11****All these are activated by one and the same Spirit, who allots to each one individually just as the Spirit chooses.”* Holy Wisdom, Holy Word. Thanks be to God.

I believe that the word “Spirit” is perhaps one of my favorite biblical words and principles. The Greek word for Spirit that is used in this passage from 1st Corinthians is the word pneuma. Pneuma, as well as the Hebrew word for Spirit, also mean wind. There are so many exegetical and theological interpretations that have been done about the Spirit being the wind or the breath of God. While I have done a lot of my own conceptual and theological ponderings on this concept, there is one distinct memory I have of when I felt the Holy Spirit of God at work in my entire body as a gusting wind.

In January of 2020 I had the opportunity to go with my dean and a group of classmates to a seminarian inter-faith weekend retreat up near Lake Texoma. One afternoon a Rabbi who was speaking at the retreat offered to lead a prayer walk for anyone who wanted to join him. While this sounded like a potentially beautiful experience, I was quite hesitant to go due to the weather. It was cold, and *incredibly* windy. But after some convincing by my friends (and probably a bit of the Spirit) I chose to go. We walked through the trees, stopping to offer blessings of praise and thanks to the beautiful bits of creation we so often take for granted, and then we wove our way down to the beachfront of the lake. We were then invited to spread out into our own spaces and spend some time with God in prayer. I walked down the beach, found myself a rock that looked out at the water, and took a seat. As I sat on my rock, shivering in the cold wind, and looked out at this little sliver of creation, pneuma came to mind. I could see and feel the Spirit of God present in the wind.

Wind is an interesting experience when you start to think about it. It is always present, and yet often goes unnoticed. It is easy to ignore the constant movement of the air around us on a typical day outside. It is generally not until the wind picks up and becomes incredibly strong that we are forced to acknowledge its presence. On this particular day down on that beach the wind had grown so strong that I was forced to acknowledge its presence. In case you haven’t noticed, I have a lot of hair. This can quickly become a struggle on a windy day. As the wind was blowing my hair in swirls around me, I was forced to turn and face directly into the wind. The strength of it on this day made me pay attention. I think there are a lot of parallels that can be explored here with the Spirit. It is always present yet can often go unnoticed. Many of us have had those particular moments however when the Spirit has felt incredibly present and forced us to look the at the presence of God in our world head on. It is in these times that we can begin to see something beautiful.

When I looked into the wind I was able to see the way the wind hitting the water was creating beautiful waves across the lake. While it is our choice how much we choose to surrender to it, the Spirit does and will always affect the ways we move in life. I also loved the way that the same wind was hitting all of the water atop the lake, and yet each wave took its own unique shape and force. *“Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone.”* In these times of crisis, in which so much is being asked of us, I invite you to ask yourself where in your life you feel the Spirit moving. What direction is it pushing you? For some it has been a call to make masks for their communities. Others have felt pushed towards continuing to feed their neighbors on the streets. Some are called to show up to their job every day in hospitals, grocery stores, or shipping companies. There is an immense variety of activities that we are called to in these new and changing times. We must remember the activating source of each of these callings is God and God’s Spirit.

As I continued sitting in the wind and talking to God on the beach that January day I also noticed the way that the waves crashed into the rocky shore, splashing over boulders that stood in the way and reshaping the sand beneath it. I believe that in a similar way, our responses to the Spirit of God have the power to change the world. We may not be able to get rid of a virus overnight. We also can’t control the acts of others, but we must recognize, own, and utilize the power that we have. The response of individuals around the globe to social distance, stay at home, and work safely have had an incredibly clear impact on “flattening the curve” of the current pandemic in their communities. Daily global CO2 emissions have decreased by 11 to 25% during the shutdowns that this pandemic has resulted in. I do not in any way want to glorify this pandemic we are facing or the terrible effects it has had on so many. What I do hope for us to see by sharing these facts is the power that we have as individuals to change the world in which we live. The claim that we cannot control the circumstances of global climate change, world health, and the lives of our brothers and sisters in faith simply cannot stand. We have power. You have power. *“To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.”* It is up to us to attend to the movement of the Spirit as we make decisions on how we are going to shape this world right now and, in the future, as we move past this most recent crisis.

I have shared with you some of the beautiful moments that I had as I sat on the beach of Lake Texoma this past January, but I don’t want to pretend that the whole experience was this glorious. That wind was fierce. And it was cold. Sometimes the movement of the Spirit in our lives can be uncomfortable. I could have chosen to remain inside to do my work and avoid this brutal wind, but these are the things I would have missed. Making the choice to be a part of God’s work in this world and movement in our lives can be difficult. We will end up in places where we are uncomfortable, unhappy, and cold. Following the Spirit is hard work, but it is to no other work than this that we are called. So let’s do it. Let’s go stand in the wind. Recognize our power for change. Move at the will of the Holy Spirit. Make waves. Crash over rocks. Shape the world in which we live. And know that the Spirit of the Lord is at work before us to guide us, below us to hold us up, behind us to propel us forward, and within us to give us strength. Amen.