

# Signature of the Wind

"I believe in the Holy Spirit."

John 3:5-8

*I Believe: Timeless Faith worth keeping #3*

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November 22, 2009

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## Being Used to a Distant God

One day I was in worship with a few other students and professors at my seminary. It was a time when it seemed the scholastic term would never end and it would be ages before I'd next see my fiancé. For the moment I'd lost sight of God's grace. Then as worship progressed Dr. Murphy took to the pulpit singing with his rich baritone voice *How Great Thou Art*. I stared at the stained glass window depicting a Mediaeval, exalted Jesus commissioning his disciples. Dr. Murphy was singing, "And when I think that God, his Son not sparing," when something happened. The ivy clinging to the cement around the window must have stirred with a breeze, shimmering the sunlight which, in turn, set the whole stained glass to life; and Dr. Murphy sang, "...Sent him to die, I scarce can take it in. That on the Cross my burden humbly bearing, he bled and died to take away my sin."

I was overwhelmed with the Word. It was one of those moments when God seemed to say, "This moment is mine. This world is mine. You are mine." And it was Heaven." It's a moment that stays with me. It lives in me...I guess I live in it.

There is so much for which to be thankful: the blessings of hearth and home; for turkey and stuffing and cranberry sauce; and even for the prowess of your kid's soccer team, to be sure; but there is so much more. Because God is God, in every moment, in every thing: there is reason for thanks.

Yet..."Because God is God in every moment, in every thing:" how does that stack up against the usual ways that lots of people believe in God or live their lives?

James once had a school project that parents were asked to share. He was given the assignment to make a castle out of cardboard and tape and maybe a couple of other side items if we thought we could get away with it. So we set out to work, having collected our cereal, gift, and oatmeal boxes, fast food cup holders and such. We made

a base out of a larger, flat box and built the walls upon it. We cut a strip out of the top surface of the base to make a moat. Then we built the glorious structure: walls and drawbridge, towers and turrets, a triangular piece of an old, red sweater on a nail on the top of an inverted cone roof; blue tissue paper for water in the moat. I did...I mean we did an admirable job! I did feel a bit guilty over the extent to which I helped...until we toured the class' display and I saw the finished product of many an engineer dad or mom.

And the castles all looked the way they were supposed to: grand and imposing and impenetrable and inaccessible. Just like Heaven is imagined to be by so many people on earth. Heaven: far away; and God sealed safe behind its walls, establishing Law and policy, policing the realm through representatives but never to be found out-and-about.

Never...right...here.

### **Spirit**

Is that what people think when the world has somehow come crashing in on them, when they lose a job or a loved one? God, far off: isn't that what it feels like when the storm's done its damage or when it's someone else who gets the job...again? God, far off: isn't that what they think when someone does something that's unjust, cruel; or when the privileged look the other way when confronted with someone without means or rights?

The Gospel according to John records this story about Nicodemus and Jesus. Nicodemus is a teacher of the Law and a member of the Sanhedrin, the ruling council of the Jews. He comes to asking Jesus what's really going on with his teaching and displays of compassion.

God, far off: isn't that what high-and-mighty Nicodemus might be thinking, still, when his curiosity is getting the better of him and he slinks through the shadows of night to ask? Because he's seen Jesus and he notices that in Jesus it's not been business as usual. He's heard Jesus' lessons about the Kingdom of God that's at hand and he's seen Jesus at work, touching people with some kind of power and unleashing it for their healing and their hope. Nicodemus, observant enough to see what most of his peers refuse to notice, sees something different going on and he wants to know why.

So he asks Jesus, “Rabbi, we know that you must be a true representative of the Most High. Otherwise, how could you do what you do?”

But Jesus, being Jesus, will not answer as though this is all about him. He turns it around and makes it also a question that’s about Nicodemus; about Nicodemus and his peers and about you and about me. “You can’t be a part of this unless you are born naturally and then also born of the Spirit.” The *Spirit*, which is God not locked up in the castle remote and removed. The Spirit, which is God among us like the ivy shaking in the wind and the sanctuary filled with the message of a stained glass window, shimmered to life: filling our world with presence and power.

You’ve got to be born of the Spirit: you’ve got to be awakened and brought to life by the God who is here. Now.

The ancient Greeks have a word for Spirit: *pneuma*. It’s the root word for pneumatics (a word used for powering tools by compressed air) and pneumonia (a disease of the lungs). It can be translated either as *breath* or *wind*.

Jesus said, “The wind (the *pneuma*) 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.” The *breath*, the *wind* of God is moving among us: you will either hide in shelter from it, or you will be moved by it.

Being filled with this Spirit, this moving presence of God is what characterized all of Jesus’ life. This is what Nicodemus had sensed in him. By this Spirit his words carried authority, he acted as one who was carried on the winds of God: his compassion, his patience, his insight, his power all bore the signature of the living, present, and powerful God.

Jesus was the signature of the wind. Nicodemus, at least could recognize the handwriting.

Now Jesus says, “You be born into it. You, also, bear the signature of the wind.

I believe in the Holy Spirit. And the holy universal church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting.

This is the fundamental belief of Christianity. When you repeat it, you are simply saying that you believe that God is present and is at work: in you; and in the church; and in the world.

Not hold up in a castle behind stone doors and high in a tower of ivory: God is here, among us where it's messy and sometimes painful and sometimes sad.

God is with you and is at work: rushing in for your rescue; opening your eyes to be aware of God and see the world as God sees it; sharing your pain, stirring you to uncanny joy sometimes in spite of the situation; and giving you the capacity to bear God's presence before others; maybe even empowering you to make the kind of impact that Jesus made.

God's signature, like all signatures, carries the authority of the One who signs it. By the power of the Spirit you are that signature.

### **Here**

Sometime if your time permits, stop in the church from 10:30 to 11:30 on a weekday morning. Just pull up a chair and take in what you see when members of our church take the lunches they packed or bowls of soup they've heated and give them to people who have come to our door, hungry. Listen to the laughter, the tough stories that are sometimes told, and see the smile on a child's face as she is led back to the kitchen for a piece of candy. Stay for long and you can see an outpouring of the love of Christ. And both those who are served and those who are serving become evident like Jesus that there is something more than human kindness going on. Blessing is being shared, a true cause for thanksgiving. God is among them. They bear the signature of the wind.

Sometime, just come and see.

Or maybe today you can watch the windows shimmer here in this very room. In fact, you can open your eyes and see God everywhere. You can open your heart, and let the Spirit in.