

John 3:1-12

<sup>1-2</sup> There was a man of the Pharisee sect, Nicodemus, a prominent leader among the Jews. Late one night he visited Jesus and said, “Rabbi, we all know you’re a teacher straight from God. No one could do all the God-pointing, God-revealing acts you do if God weren’t in on it.”

<sup>3</sup> Jesus said, “You’re absolutely right. Take it from me: Unless a person is born from above, it’s not possible to see what I’m pointing to—to God’s kingdom.”

<sup>4</sup> “How can anyone,” said Nicodemus, “be born who has already been born and grown up? You can’t re-enter your mother’s womb and be born again. What are you saying with this ‘born-from-above’ talk?”

<sup>5-6</sup> Jesus said, “You’re not listening. Let me say it again. Unless a person submits to this original creation—the ‘wind-hovering-over-the-water’ creation, the invisible moving the visible, a baptism into a new life—it’s not possible to enter God’s kingdom. When you look at a baby, it’s just that: a body you can look at and touch. But the person who takes shape within is formed by something you can’t see and touch—the Spirit—and becomes a living spirit.

<sup>7-8</sup> “So don’t be so surprised when I tell you that you have to be ‘born from above’—out of this world, so to speak. You know well enough how the wind blows this way and that. You hear it rustling through the trees, but you have no idea where it comes from or where it’s headed next. That’s the way it is with everyone ‘born from above’ by the wind of God, the Spirit of God.”

<sup>9</sup> Nicodemus asked, “What do you mean by this? How does this happen?”

<sup>10-12</sup> Jesus said, “You’re a respected teacher of Israel and you don’t know these basics? Listen carefully. I’m speaking sober truth to you. I speak only of what I know by experience; I give witness only to what I have seen with my own eyes. There is nothing secondhand here, no hearsay. Yet instead of facing the evidence and accepting it, you procrastinate with questions. If I tell you things that are plain as the hand before your face and you don’t believe me, what use is there in telling you of things you can’t see, the things of God?”

## **Wind**

We’re in the third week of our Season of Creation having explored how FIRE and EARTH relate to our walk with Jesus Christ, and today we explore WIND. Wind has been in the news lately with Hurricane Irma left a path of devastation in the Caribbean and the Florida Keys. I remember living through Hurricane Camille back in 1969 when I was 9 years old; it struck the Gulf Coast as a category 5 hurricane – the second most intense tropical cyclone to hit the United States on record. I remember Super Storm Sandy – Hyesun and I were lying in bed listening to the wind and wondering if any trees would fall on the house.

But wind is not all bad; anyone who has been in the Midwest is familiar with the many wind turbines that generate electricity for the people there, and anyone who has ever been sailing knows the joy and the thrill of skimming across the water in a sailboat. I have memories of

sailing on the Rappahannock River, and there the wind was a friend like it was to the sailors who came thousands of years before me who had learned to harness the wind to travel around the world and discover new lands. Wind allowed adventure on the high seas!

Today I want to explore wind as a metaphor for the Holy Spirit and how we adapt or fail to adapt to such a wind, either blowing *with* the wind or struggling *against* the wind. Conveniently both the Greek and the Hebrew words for *wind* can also mean *spirit*. In today's lesson when Jesus speaks of the *wind* blowing this way and that, and thus anyone who is born of the Spirit is like the wind, blowing this way and that, not knowing where it's heading next. This truly speaks of a life of faith when we trust in God to 'blow' us wherever we're needed, and that is contrasted to a life without faith where we try to determine our own direction and so often fight the wind. And what Jesus is telling Nicodemus is how one needs to be born of the Spirit, or born of the wind, to live as God wants us to live. And Nicodemus is completely baffled by this idea of being born *again*, or born of the Spirit. So let me explain how this plays itself out in the life of the believer.

In order to do that, I need to go over our history with God, which is basic Christian doctrine. We were created in God's image, and therefore perfect. But we decided to disobey God and set our own rules, and things got really bad, because everyone made up their own rules to suit themselves. We still struggle with that today, don't we? People want to make laws that work in their own favor. So what did God do? Well first he gave us laws to follow – like the Ten Commandments – to keep us from hurting each other and robbing each other. That helped, but it wasn't enough, because people *still* tried to interpret the laws in ways that best suited them. We all do that today; if you're a child and your bedtime is 9 p.m. and your mother says "Go to bed" at 9 p.m., you may go to your bed with your favorite toys or turn on the television in your room, and you technically haven't broken any laws. You are interpreting the word "bedtime" to your advantage. I remember once when I was driving around looking for a parking place and seeing a sign that said "No Standing" I thought "How silly that you can't stand around that sign, but it doesn't say anything about not *parking* there." Guess what happened when I parked there?

And so God's people could not keep the Law that God gave them. But to tell you the truth, even if they *had* kept the law that God gave them, they would not have kept it *in Spirit*. In other words they could obey the law, but their hearts would not be changed for the better; there are plenty of people who obey every law but love neither God nor their neighbor. And that's not what God wants. He created us to love one another, and even giving a law that orders us to love one another doesn't make it happen.

So what God did was send Jesus, to show us how to live and love, and when people killed him God raised him up to show that he was the Son of God and that this is who we must follow. And instead of giving us just another set of rules to follow God sends Jesus to show his love, to demonstrate his love by dying on the cross for us so that we can know just how much we are loved and respond in kind. We can be so moved by God's love, and so assured of our forgiveness by the Resurrection, that we can live and love without fear or reservation. That's how I believe the Holy Spirit comes to us. When we are so moved by God's love, which God gives us in full measure, we give *our* full measure; this is what Jesus meant when he said, "Those who seek to keep their life will lose it, while those who lose their life for my sake will *gain* it." In our

scripture reading today Jesus speaks of being born from above; that means we need to die to what is below. We find new life in Christ and everything changes.

And so our life in Christ is life in the Spirit which is a life that flows with the wind rather than working against it. The way I see that playing out in my life is that I no longer live for myself most of the time; I live for others, and the needs of others will change my direction from minute to minute, hour to hour. In Jesus' three years of ministry he was all over the map – going through Galilee, Samaria, crossing the lake to visit this town and that, heading down to Jericho and Jerusalem. When his friend Lazarus was ill, and then died, he travelled three days to Bethany to visit his house. Such is a life of ministry; you just don't know which way the Spirit of God will blow you at any given time.

The question I'd like to ask today is, "Are you born from above?" Have you fully surrendered your life to God or are you still trying to hold onto it as if it was yours to hold onto? Do you take Jesus at his word when he says, "Those who seek to keep their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will gain it"? And are you instilling this ethos in your children? I know that so many of you sacrifice so much time and energy for your children, taking them to this practice and to that game and to that recital and that activity, but how do you show them that you are born from above, that you have given your life to Jesus and are being led by the Holy Spirit? Because they take your lead. If your greatest priority is attaining some level of wealth and creature comfort, some status or level of safety, that will be your child's greatest priority. If worshiping God and giving him praise is fifth or sixth or seventh on your list of priorities, that's where it will be on their list. But if you make God a priority in your life, your children will follow suit.

Because not only will your children understand the true meaning of life; they will also see the joy you experience in living life in the Spirit. Who is your child's favorite teacher in school? Probably the one who is most inspired to teach. My son's favorite high school teacher was a biology teacher; guess what my son majored in? Are your children seeing that you are inspired by Jesus Christ? If so, they will be inspired.

You know, some churches stress that you have an obligation to worship, that you must attend services every so often or you're soul will be in mortal peril. I don't play that game. I believe God loves you so much that he would not make your eternal life contingent upon your attendance record. I believe that people should come to church because they really *want* to come to church, to be with people they love in order to worship the God they love. And I truly feel sorry for anyone who has not experienced the love of God in Jesus Christ to such an extent that they truly *desire* to worship God, to sing praises to him and declare how wonderful he is in Christian fellowship and to teach your children how important this is by the example you set. I feel sorry for such people because they haven't learned the joy of living in the Spirit, and their life is spent in struggle against the wind because they haven't bowed down to God's authority and insist on living according to their own desires.

The choice is yours, to move with the wind or against it, to make God your priority, or to put him down the list a few notches. But your child's priorities will be *your* priorities. Make sure that you make God your #1 priority.