

The Wind Blows

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Sunday 7 June 2015

John 3⁴⁻¹⁰ / Acts 2¹⁻¹⁵

What are we about here in this place? Why do we come each Sunday to worship? What calls us back to this place? Let me tell you. **Life! calls us back.** The faith of Christ **is life!** Jesus promises us nothing less than life – **in all its fullness!** You and I have this faint sneaking suspicion that we're not really alive – that there is a life which has escaped us and I am here to tell you **you're right!**

Only Christ can bring us back to life. Only Christ can help us recover what we lost so long ago. Only Christ can give us the life that brings with it a peace everlasting.

G K Chesterton once said this...

'A dead thing can go with the stream, but only a living thing can go against it.'

Unless you want simply to be carried away in the stream of life allowing the current to have its way with you you will choose Christ today – you will open your heart to Jesus and you will say 'Jesus, I am a sinner, have mercy on me and grant me Your life!'

But how does that life come? Where do we find it? I want to point you in the direction of that life today because the NT is quite specific about it and one of them is that it is the Spirit who brings life for as Paul says in 1 Corinthians...

⁵Not that we are competent of ourselves to claim anything as coming from us; our competence is from God, ⁶who has made us competent to be ministers of a new covenant, not of letter but of spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.' (2 Cor 3)

When the Spirit gives life we begin to discover all sorts of things. We discover purpose; we discover, hope; we discover joy and we discover **identity**. So who are you today and how might you discover who you are? Knowing who we are is one of our most important quests in life. Rabbi Zusya, when he was an old man, said, "In the coming world, they will not ask me: 'Why were you not Moses?' They will ask me: 'Why were you not Zusya?'"

The question 'Who am I?' touches every part of our life. It touches what we will do, it touches how we will behave, it touches what we will reject and what we will accept. It touches how we will live and likely how we will die. And for most of us it's the question we most avoid because it touches so much and because it forces us to really know ourselves. The saying on this picture is so true – 'People say that walking away is the hardest thing to do... but it isn't. Staying is the toughest.' And how true that is of ourselves. Much easier to get lost in drugs or booze or work or buying things, possessions, advancement, more education.

And the question 'Who Am I?' is a theological question. Whoever we decide we are will clearly effect how we relate to God; how

we believe; what we believe. And this is a central question for the New Testament. It is full of 'You are...' statements.

You are the salt of the earth... You are a light on a hill... You are much more valuable than many sparrows... you are not under law but under grace... you are not in the flesh but in the spirit... you are the children of God... you are the Temple of God...

Indeed, God calls us to discover the person we were meant to be ... **in Him!** The Spirit comes to help us in this quest so it is important to know how the Spirit does this. And so we'll look at Acts over the next few weeks and the first thing I want to do is to ask...

What's going on in this passage from Acts? I mean what's all this spooky stuff? Tongues of fire, different languages? And this is the birth of the Church or so Christian thinking down through the years has considered it.

Can we settle on one thing? This did happen. There is enough historical evidence here to be quite sure of that. It was, after all, quite public. Many people witnesses it – people who weren't Christians, people who had nothing to lose by denying it – indeed, being Jewish they may well have had quite a bit to gain if they wanted to destroy this fledgling movement. But they didn't. Why? Because too many others saw it.

One of the interesting features of this story is that the Spirit's first great act after Jesus has risen is to do something that works to include many people in God's redemptive plan and to break down

barriers to God's love. By speaking in different languages, in the languages of those gathered to worship God at Pentecost. So what is revealed here is that the Spirit works to reveal God to as many as possible and I have no doubt that in this we have revealed a primary motive of God's love – that as many as possible might know it.

In John, however, we have another key aim of the Spirit revealed and this is to bring 'new birth' and with it 'new life.'

“Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit. ⁶What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit. ⁷Do not be astonished that I said to you, ‘You must be born from above.’ (John 3)

It seems that somehow we are so wrongly connected to life that we all need a new start – a completely different beginning which amounts to a different way of being. The Bible variously describes it as 'new life,' 'blind receiving sight,' 'turning completely around and going in a different direction,' 'the changing of one's mind,' and 'repentance.' And no matter well we do life, how together we have things and how well we are thought of – we all, every one of us, need this new start. The Bible is clear, **‘There is no one who is righteous, not even one; ¹¹there is no one who has understanding, there is no one who seeks God.’** (Roms 3) At the heart of this change is the Person the Bible calls the Holy Spirit. But who is this Person?

One of the great struggles I think we all have with the Spirit is the lack of identity. With Jesus identity is easy. We can see it because we can see Him. He was, after all, like us. He was born, He had a body, He suffered, He experienced joy, He died – just like us. We can **identify** with Christ.

Even with God the Father we have a name we can all identify with even if for some this identity is actually quite negative. No all of us had fathers who treated us well. But what kind of identity comes with the words ‘Holy’ and ‘Spirit?’

When Jesus talks about the Spirit He actually addresses this issue in his conversation by showing that we must become **like** the Spirit.

‘⁷Do not be astonished that I said to you, ‘You must be born from above.’⁸The 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.’ (John 3)

So not only are we to we change, but we are to change **to become like the Spirit**. And this begs the question immediately what is the Spirit like? The Spirit is like the wind. You can’t see it, you can’t see where it comes from and you can’t even see where it goes to. All you can do is hear it and, perhaps, feel it on your skin.

And we, are to become like the Spirit!

If you're anything like me this sounds, well to be quite frank, weird! I mean what's with this ghostly thing where we are hardly known and other people can hardly notice us? How do we become like the Spirit?

1. The first way is that, like the Spirit, we look to Christ for our identity. One of the main reasons it's so hard to pin the identity of the Spirit down is because the Spirit's identity is Jesus so if you're looking for a third identity you won't find it. The Spirit is 'the Spirit **of Christ**' and when we open our lives to the Spirit we too discover our identity in Him. When Christ comes in everything begins to take its lead from Him and an interesting thing happens. It becomes hard to predict what we will do from what people can see. Often, once we become Christians, people are confused about who we are because their eyes see one thing and their experience of us says another. (story of dogs and dairy farmer)

Indeed, we can often begin to wonder who we are because our own spirit is changed within us to one that knows the peace of Christ and exhibits the fruit of that peace. We get into situations that before Christ would have made us mad or turned us sour and we suddenly find we are not moved in this way any longer but the peace of Christ surrounds us. Or we get into situations which would've created great fear in us and suddenly we find ourselves unmoved and at peace. Or we are confronted by a pitiful sight that would've left us

untouched before but now a great compassion swells in our heart and we want to do something about it.

What's happening? Christ is becoming our identity and in doing so bringing out the truth about us. What is that truth? It is this, that without Christ we didn't know who we were but with Christ we can discover it.

2. The second thing that happens is that in the same way that the Spirit which like the wind touches all – so our actions will tend to touch many more people when we take our lead from the Spirit. To do this we need to **allow the Spirit to take us to new places**. How does this work?

Think of the natural obscurity of Christ – born into a poor family in a nation which was one of the smallest in the world dominated by an imperial power, with no birth right to speak of, no natural power, no political influence whatsoever and, who died young after only 3 years of ministry. Can you imagine anyone less likely to influence the world and yet, He has changed the whole world and He goes on changing the whole world one life at a time. How? Because all of His identity is now wrapped up in the Holy Spirit who takes all that is Jesus and spreads it like the wind to the four corners of the earth. And this is precisely what happens to us.

When we give ourselves to the new birth God usually leads us into obscurity where we learn the lessons of anonymous obedience and delight. And this is where the economy of the

Kingdom of God is so different to that of the world. In the world it is up to us to create influence – to find the upward path. In the Kingdom it is God through the Holy Spirit who influences those around. Our job is to stay connected to God through the Spirit and when we do this we create something the Spirit can use far and wide. (Story of Livingstone's conversion, Sunday school teacher who ministered in Scottish Highlands for 40 years and was sad he'd only had one convert. It was David Livingstone.)

For forty days the disciples we meet in Acts 2 had obeyed Christ. They'd waited together, they'd prayed, they'd eaten, they'd slept. Perhaps the most normal and most un-influential things they could do. What could the Spirit do with this?

Then in one short period of praise – perhaps only lasting 15 to 20 minutes – they turned the world upside down by praising God in other languages.

This is how we extend the borders of the Kingdom friends. We allow the Spirit to bring us to new birth and we discover our identity in that new relationship. Then, no matter how obscure our lives are Holy Spirit, in time, will take our obedience and create a new kingdom with it.

Are you ready for the ride? Is this you this morning? Are you ready for new birth or perhaps you've been wondering how God might use you? Don't worry about that. Open your heart. Allow God to take you to the places the Spirit wants. Allow God to give

you your true identity and you will know peace. Let's pray together...