

Rebecca L. Kiser
Staying Connected to God - Through the Spirit
5/21/2021 Day of Pentecost B

You all know that I am intrigued by things our sciences have discovered and are discovering. The breadth and depth of creation, its mysteries and intricacies amaze me, and bring me to awe and worship. As I sat and pondered about God's Spirit being everywhere, including in us, I sat on my little back patio, with a view of a band of forest - trees, animals, birds, wind, new growth. Deer cruise behind and around my apartment complex of several hundred apartments and people; birds sing in the trees, and squirrels and chipmunks fuss when Mr B is outside - I can usually tell where he is by the noise of the birds and squirrels. We have a fox nearby right now, who my neighbor and I have seen near dawn and dusk, and I've seen a big, fat groundhog or something as well. I'm in this huge apartment complex and wild nature is just off my patio! I especially like to watch the leaves flutter in the breeze, the sun hitting them as they move in and out of sunlight. Their stems are so slender! The leaves move, the branch its on moves, the larger branch it's embedded in moves - everything dances and sways except the strong central trunk. I imagine the Spirit as wind, the way this text talks about the sound of a mighty rushing wind, and think of the Spirit as breezes blowing through our lives, and wonder if I move and sway as well as the leaves and trees, when the Spirit's wind blows in my life.

As I was also preparing for the Blessing of the Animals service yesterday, as well as this sermon, I was doubly aware of God's love for all things, God's care for the world as well as the people. The elements that make up my body also make up trees, animals, bugs, grass, Trilliums that I love, Mr B, and the concrete of my patio. And it all came from stardust, star stuff eons ago; it all grew on this planet, within the parameters of our distance from the sun, the gravity of our earth's density, the light that traveled this far, and the oxygen available from the plant life. We developed what we needed for survival - our nose smells what it needs to smell; our eyes see what we need to see, using just a small part of the light spectrum; our ears what we need to hear, a small spectrum of the range of sounds. We perceive certain waves of light and sound, but not all of it - we perceive just enough.

Being me, I wonder what's actually here that we **can't** see or hear, with these eyes & ears that have evolved in the parameters of our particular world habitat. Some people talk of seeing aura or energy - maybe they really do, maybe it's just outside our normal range of perception. Maybe if we were made differently, we'd see the Spirit among us more distinctly - maybe the reality of God's presence among us is hovering just outside the ability of our human

eyes and ears to perceive. Jesus told folks that the Spirit is like the wind - we don't see the wind, although we can see where it's been and what it does.

We forget that all of this earth's creation works together as a habitat overall - an oxygen-based, carbon-based, light-dependent habitat. We study habitats in school - ecosystems of water or dryness, grasses and trees or cactus, swamps, salty water or clear, some mixed. We have a grasp about how the parts of a habitat affect what creatures can live there, what they eat, how they live. We humans are part of a habitat, too - we developed to live on THIS planet, THIS far from the sun, THIS amount of oxygen protected by the ozone layer and cleaned by the trees. You know, I used to laugh at the early Star Trek episodes where all the life forms they encountered were like us -with a few differences imagined by the writers; but they could hear us, could speak, had arms and legs, had life partners. And I snickered at the movie Close Encounters of the Third Kind that assumed other life forms would have our same scale of music. Although there is a good bit of math in the vibrations that make up our intervals and notes, it's our limited ears that have to hear the right vibrations and waves, and translate them in our brains.

I ended up in an argument once with a woman at a conference, who insisted that the perceived, material world was a lesser world, and a supernatural spiritual world was higher and better - and that they were distinct from each other. I think our Holy Writings teach of a unity - that all is suffused with God, that God's Spirit is intermixed in all that is, as God created it; that there is more around us than our eyes and ears and noses have evolved to perceive. Yes, I think the Kingdom of God, the Realm of God, the Kindom of God - call it what you will - is where we are meant to live, and that God says we can live in it now, while we live here on earth. Eternal life has started - when we respond to God and begin to seek that relationship, that union with God through the Spirit, then our eternal life has begun. Meister Eckart, an early Christian mystic, said, "Between our soul and God, there IS no between!" The Spirit makes us one, unites us, surrounds us, indwells us, animates us (ie gives life), inspires us (ie gives breath). The Psalmist says that there is nowhere we can go where God is not already there.

The poem called the Breastplate of St Patrick says in its last verse, taking on the presence of God as a shield: **Christ with me, Christ before me, Christ behind me, Christ in me, Christ beneath me, Christ above me, Christ on my right, Christ on my left, Christ when I lie down, Christ when I sit down, Christ when I arise, Christ in the heart of everyone who thinks of me, Christ in the mouth of everyone who speaks of me, Christ in every eye that sees me, Christ in every ear that hears me.**

The apostle John speaks of this oneness when he tells of Christ's prayer before his death, that Christ is in God and God in him, and he in us believers, and us in him, and all in God. The Hebrew Scriptures tell of the work of the Spirit, as we read this morning in that wonder chapter of Ezekiel where a nation dead and dusty is promised that power of the spirit to recreate, reanimate, and re blow the breath of life into it all. Our Christian Scriptures tell us in the chapter of Acts we read, about how the Spirit again came in power to kindle a great outpouring of the gospel that overcame divisive barriers we've invented between ourselves - language barriers, economic barriers, country of origin barriers, gender barriers, age barriers - Scripture says that all heard in their own tongue and thousands believed. God's Spirit enabled each person to so hear, that they were convicted; they heard the Truth and believed it.

On this Pentecost Sunday, we celebrate that the very Spirit of God is ever present and always at work, in us, around us and through us - and we are challenged to believe this, and accept this, as being as true reality as the material things we can touch. Especially to raise our own awareness of this encompassing oneness between myself, the others here in the world, and God's Self. If that's hard to wrap our heads around, think of living in the Spirit of God as fish living in water - are fish conscious of the water? Certainly they gasp and die when they're not immersed in it; usually they swim and eat and move around in the water and take it for granted. Think of being suffused with the Spirit as how we take the air around us for granted - except when its quality gets fouled, or if we get out of Earth's gravity and the air is too thin for our lungs to breathe it. Imagine us living in God, God all around us, God in us, God filling all the spaces between things here in our sanctuary and outside our windows. God everywhere, God sustaining our life, God holding all of creation, to the ends of the universe and beyond, all in God.

That's an amazing vision, isn't it? And when we are conscious of this great unity, when we are in tune with what God asks of us, when we believe all God has told us about life and the world and reality - then we are conscious of that mystical union that all the past and present mystics have talked and written about; we begin to live daily the presence of God, our prayer never ends, as our communication with God is constant. When we go to plan some new activities for our congregation, the Spirit is there in our thinking as well as in our hoping for good outreach and for the gospel to be spread. When we hope for new folks to join this local group, we lift them up to God as persons God is already seeking, persons who need the healing and grace of God in their lives - this is prayer, this is Spirit. We prayed and prepared ourselves to hear the Spirit and be led by the Spirit when we did our Visioning Process. When we elect our

Pastor Nominating committee, we do it trusting that the Spirit has led us in our selection, and will lead them in their process, and eventually lead us to a new relationship with a pastor.

God, as Spirit, has been working in human history as far back as we can imagine - the Day of Pentecost wasn't the first advent of Spirit among us; it was, however, a special outpouring of power and miracle to kick start this church thing into being. People who were gathered for that festival in Jerusalem, people from all around the Mediterranean Sea, experienced hearing the truth of Jesus in their own language and were convicted of its truth; then they carried their changed heart back to their hometowns and began to gather with others who believed. Paul and Peter, the other apostles and believers, all began to visit and reach more, to write the letters we have in our Scriptures today, to learn to live in the ways Christ taught, all filled with and guided by God as Spirit. Some folks call Pentecost the Church's Birthday - maybe we should wish the church Happy Birthday on Facebook!

As I was growing up in the church, I never heard much about God as Spirit. We SAID Father, Son, Spirit, or we said Creator, Redeemer, Sustainer - our trinitarian language always included an acknowledgment of the Spirit.....Rarely did I hear a sermon about the experience of the living Spirit among us. Rarely did I hear a sermon about the radical union possible for us with God through the work of the Spirit. I heard about Jesus, and forgiveness, and conviction (which is actually the spirit's doing) , and being "saved," and giving our life to Jesus, and following God's ways in certain things, and praying. But rarely did anyone speak of the depth of experience of God made possible and opened up to us through the unity of the spirit.

It makes a difference in our perception of living, and a difference in our perception of the material world, to trust that all around us is suffused with God's Spirit, and that we are truly joined to one another through the Spirit. Try sitting in your own backyard this afternoon, as I talked about at the beginning here, and imagining God all around, in between, and inside yourself. Imagine being joined to God the Creator, God as Jesus, God as Spirit, and all believers around the world - and see what kinds of differences that makes. AMEN.