

¹²"I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. ¹³When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own, but will speak whatever he hears, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. ¹⁴He will glorify me, because he will take what is mine and declare it to you. ¹⁵All that the Father has is mine. For this reason I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you.

The word of God for the People of God.

Thanks be to God.

The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, this God of the Hebrew faith and the Christian faith...has always been sort of...different...from the other Gods. Our God has always had trouble fitting in, you see. Other gods, during biblical times, and perhaps during our time, too, other gods are manifested by something. They're tangible, they are contained in a certain place, or a certain object. In Acts 17, as Paul is hanging out in Athens, the greek gods and goddesses are part of the walking tour--head this way if you'd like to go see the temple with the statue of Athena, and go this way if you're more interested in seeing the shrine of Zeus. Everywhere he went there were statues and temples, places where the people would go to worship and appeal to the God who lived there. Those Gods were tangibly present, you knew where to find them, you knew where to go and bring your prayers and your offerings for rain, or fertility.

But our God never was interested in statues. In fact, when the Israelites came out of Egypt, they tried to fit God into a golden calf figurine, but God would not be contained in that. In fact, the whole story of the Hebrew people is one in which they try and try again to reduce God to be like the other gods--to be a god they can fit into a golden figurine or a stone statue, one they can house in a tent or a

temple, one they can control or manipulate to give them what they think they want. But our God simply would not be tamed, would not be reduced.

The psalmist knew that the only appropriate response to this God was this: "Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name throughout the earth! You made your glory higher than heaven!"

Today is trinity Sunday, the day when pastors make bad math jokes about how $1 + 1 + 1$ doesn't equal three but rather $1 + 1 + 1 = 1$, and pastors make bad metaphors about how God is like Neopolitan ice cream with three flavors in one pint-size box. It's the day when we all come together and say, "Father, Son, and Holy Spirit--we don't get it, but it's awesome!"

In our reading today from the gospel of John, as Jesus neared the end of his time with his disciples, he began to talk with his disciples. For four chapters straight in the gospel of John, he talks to his disciples, sharing his love for them, telling them how they should love one another, telling them to stay connected to him because he is the vine and they are the branches, telling them his time is coming, that he will soon leave them. And in the midst of this, Jesus lets us in on the workings of God. He points us to the trinity of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and he tries to explain how he will leave and return to the Father, but the Holy Spirit will come, he reassures them that the holy spirit is the one that they need now, the Spirit is the one who will guide them, that through the Spirit he will still be present to them, Jesus lets his disciples--and us--in on these inner workings of this trinitarian God.

And in truth, I don't think they don't understand a word of it. Again and again, they are asking one another, "What does he mean when he says this?" And asking Jesus, "Well, when are you going to show us the father?"

Jesus might as well just stop and say, "You know what? Just trust me. We've got this."

When I was in my seminary course on worship, I can remember one of the days we were studying baptism, and we had learned the word, "Epiclesis." Epiclesis means literally to call upon, and it's the word for the part of a sacrament where we invite the spirit to act. You hear it in the service of holy communion and in baptism when we say, "Pour out your holy spirit on this bread and wine, or pour out your holy spirit on this water." This is the part of this act where we boldly believe that through the Holy Spirit, the trinitarian God actually **does** something, that God acts upon these ordinary things and makes them sacramental things. So my teacher this day in my worship class was asking us, "So, what happens in the epiclesis?" And I, of course, was ready with my textbook answers: Well, in the epiclesis, we believe the Holy Spirit comes and is active in the sacrament." The teacher pressed me, "Yes, but what does the spirit do?" "Well, the spirit blesses the water and the one who receives it, just like it says." She pressed further: "Yes, but what does the spirit do?" I was determined to get the answer right, I had this, I knew it: "Through the spirit, God washes away their sin and clothe them in righteousness--" "ok, but that is through the spirit, what is it that the spirit does to make that happen? What does the spirit do... to the

water, to the bread, to you, to me--don't tell me how the spirit works, tell me what does it do, what does the the spirit do???"

"I don't know."

And she said..."Exactly."

Author C. Joybell C. writes, "I have come to accept the feeling of not knowing where I am going. And I have trained myself to love it. Because it is only when we are suspended in mid-air with no landing in sight, that we force our wings to unravel and alas begin our flight. And as we fly, we still may not know where we are going to. But the miracle is in the unfolding of the wings. You may not know where you're going, but you know that so long as you spread your wings, the winds will carry you."

The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, is the same God who entered into chaos and swept across the dark waters. It is the same God who breathed air into a lifeless pile of clay. It is the same God who Moses glimpsed from the cleft in the mountain. It is the same God who blew through the mounds of dry bones as they came rattling together, and were covered with skin and were filled with...breath. It is the same God who in the laboring breath of a mother came gasping into this earth. It is the same God who entered the disciples' bunker and breathed peace onto them, and into them. It is the same God who came with rushing wind and flickering flames, and made a church. It is the same God who rushed down into

this tub, this trough and did I don't know what, but somehow lifted a 9-year old girl up from death to new life.

In a sanctuary as big as this one, in a church as established as this one, in an institution as grounded as the United Methodist Church, we struggle and we chafe against the elusiveness of the spirit. Our God, indeed, will not be contained. Sam Wells says that the Holy Spirit is much more unpredictable, subversive and playful than the church would usually like it to be. It can't be controlled by the powerful and the qualified, and it can't be limited by clergy or by Scripture. It makes for an uncertain, roller-coaster experience of faith for those who want their religion tidy and measured; but it's an invitation to a kingdom more radical, more wonderful and more joyful than most Christians dare to believe in. And when we will allow it, the Spirit draws us into the life of the triune God; as we rise up from the water, the spirit unfurls our wings and sets us to flight. We may not know where we are going. We may be suspended in mid-air with no landing in sight. Like Jesus told the disciples, there are still things we do not know, there are things we will not understand; there are circumstances in our lives that will confuse us and make us fearful; at times everything will seem uncertain, even perhaps the future of the church itself, but by Jesus' promise there will always be a wind to carry us, to carry us high again, to catch us in a nose-dive, to push us in new directions, and by God's grace to make us soar again.

How God moves, we can't predict it. Where the spirit blows and takes us, it's not ours to control. Ah, but to trust, to trust is spread your wings, and fly.

In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.