

The Wind Blows

Psalm 29 & John 3:1-17

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First Presbyterian, Luling

Today is Trinity Sunday. Preachers, at least this preacher, dread it. It's almost impossible to explain the Trinity without drifting into heresies in every direction. Even if you're not trying to explain it, it's hard to even say why it's significant or makes a difference in lives of everyday people, including the life of the preacher. It's not that there's nothing to say, it's that there's too much to say. But the more you say, the less likely you are to be correct. And the lectionary passage choosers aren't exactly helpful, but they had an unenviable task, because nowhere in scripture does the word Trinity appear. And only a few places where Father, Son, and Spirit appear together. It gets even trickier when trying to find Old Testament passage to complement the New Testament ones. But some of the selections seem to be a bit of a stretch. All of that is to say that I don't know that today's sermon is going to be an identifiably Trinity Sunday sermon.

Though this isn't the verse we most often pick out of that reading, it's what caught my ear this time. Verse 8: "The 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 born of the Spirit." A quick reminder that "wind" and "Spirit" are the same word in both Greek and Hebrew. They also overlap with breath. The Greek word is *pneuma*, which we know from words like pneumonia or a pneumatic drill. The verb "blow" is also related and sounds similar in Greek. So that verse might just as easily be read "The Spirit spirits 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 born of the Spirit." Or, again just as easily, "The wind blows where it chooses....so it is with everyone born of the wind." You get the idea. Wind and Spirit and Breath are overlapping, interchangeable, related concepts. English loses all that, but we can kind of grasp it, I think.

Wind. We've had some of that around here lately. Luling had it one week, and La Grange the next. The La Grange storm was part of a *derecho*, a weather phenomenon I hadn't even heard of until a few years ago. The National Weather Service says a *derecho* is "a long-lived, wind storm that is associated with a band of rapidly moving showers or thunderstorms...by definition, if the wind damage swath extends more than 240 miles and includes wind gusts of at least 58 mph or

greater along most of its length, then the event may be classified as a derecho.”¹ Derecho, by the way, means straight in Spanish. I understand our derecho had a damage path of over 1000 miles long.

The wind is frightening because of the damage it does. Its power. We can see the effects of how strong it blows, as we see roofs removed and huge trees downed. It’s also frightening because we aren’t in control of it. It’s unpredictable. We said last week the Spirit is the same. It’s a little scary because of its power, the way we aren’t in control of it, it’s unpredictability. The wind blows where it chooses. The Spirit spirits where it chooses.

The message is much the same from the Psalm. It’s a psalm of God’s power made evident in nature. “The voice of the Lord is over the waters” is likely a reference to Genesis 1, where a wind from God, or a spirit from God (again, wind and spirit are the same word)—a wind or spirit from God swept over the face of the waters (Genesis 1:2). The voice of the Lord is powerful, full of majesty. It breaks the cedars of Lebanon, which were famous for their strength. The voice of the Lord shakes the wilderness and causes the oaks to whirl, strips the forest bare. It’s a spring Texas thunderstorm, probably with a tornado warning, sounds like to me. We know this power, and the psalmist defines this power as being the voice of the Lord. As strong as the power of the storm, the Lord is stronger. The psalm emphasizes this by saying the Lord is enthroned over the flood, enthroned as king forever. And then it closes with this: May the Lord bless his people with peace.

I’ve noticed often that after a natural disaster, people turn to this psalm for comfort. Kind of like the Spirit last week, it’s simultaneously comforting and discomfoting. The power of destruction that the voice of the Lord brings, power that we see in natural disasters, is scary. It’s all here in the psalm, too. Fire, wind, storm, flood, earthquake. It’s not comfortable to think of a God who is that out of our control. The comfort comes in that final verse, though: May this God, the powerful one, the one more powerful than this frightening thing we’ve experienced, may that God bless us with peace. That peace, then, is likewise powerful.

The wind, the Spirit, the essence of God is frightening. We aren’t in control of it. It’s unpredictable. The wind blows where it chooses. The spirit spirits where it chooses. The voice of the Lord shakes us.

I said last week that I thought we are ready for the Spirit to stir things up. That’s a bold thing to say, because it means that we aren’t in control of where the Spirit might blow us. It will be where the Spirit chooses. I picture us like Mary

¹ <https://www.weather.gov/lmk/derecho>

Poppins with her umbrella and carpet bag, being blown in by the east wind. Where will the Spirit drop us down? What task will the Spirit blow us toward?

Where might the wind blow us? Where might the Spirit spirit us to? Yes, thinking about that is a little scary. But, and here's where I come back to Trinity Sunday. We know this Spirit, because we know this God. This Father-Son-Spirit God. That's the God we know. The God who so loved the world. The God who will bless the people with peace. The blustery, blowing Spirit is part of that same God. That God would not be God without the Spirit's blowing presence. The God who sent the son into the world not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him. That's the Spirit that we're entrusting ourselves to.

We don't need to pack much in our carpet bag. Mary Poppins aside, I'm not sure we even need one. Let's open up that black umbrella and let the Spirit blow us where it chooses. Hang on, it's going to be a fun ride.