

**We Sing of the Spirit**  
**Lent 2**  
**March 4, 2007**

“...we sing of God the Spirit,  
who from the beginning has swept over the face of creation,  
animating all energy and matter  
and moving in the human heart.”

In the movie “Chocolat”, the wind is a character.  
The wind blows - and a beautiful, strange woman and her little girl  
move into the very traditional French village.  
The wind blows – and the woman’s new shop, specializing in chocolate,  
opens for the public – in the season of Lent  
when everyone is encouraged to fast.  
The wind blows reluctant customers into her shop  
and under the spell of the spicy hot chocolate she serves.  
The wind blows and the new priest in town  
struggles with the high and puritanical expectations of the town mayor.  
The wind blows and things happen –  
surprising things, unsettling things, things that bring hope and energy  
to a town worn and weary from old ways.

The wind is also a character in Christian thought  
and in the Bible where it’s name is *ruah* in Hebrew.  
We also speak of it as the Spirit of God, the Holy Spirit, or simply, the Spirit.  
The Spirit’s work is to bring forth life and nurture it,  
to hold all things together,  
and constantly renew what the ravages of time and sin break down.  
In John’s gospel, Jesus says, “the wind blows where it chooses,  
but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes.” (John 3: 8)

Some of the Bible’s words for the spirit –  
words like *ruah* and *shekinah* (the presence of God)  
are feminine.

In Proverbs, the one who plays with God,  
helping in the work of creation, is Sophia, wisdom,  
a feminine figure.

That is why theologians and hymn-writers of today  
speak of the Spirit in feminine terms:

“She comes sailing on the wind...”

“She Who Is” by Elizabeth Johnson.

One doesn’t have to, of course,  
but it does us good to open the boxes we create around God  
and let the Spirit’s playfulness, creativity and justice  
move in our world.

We Christians have a tradition of Trinity:  
God in three persons.  
Distinct yet united as one.  
It's a paradox.  
But there are ways of imagining that can help.  
One early Christian image saw God as the sun,  
incarnated in a beam of light (Jesus) streaming to the earth,  
and the Spirit the point of light that actually arrives and affects the earth  
with warmth and energy.  
It is all the one shining light.  
Or, the holy mystery can be pictured as an upwelling spring of water,  
the river that flows outward from this source,  
and the irrigation channel where the water meets and moistens the earth, Spirit.  
And it is all the one flowing water.  
Yet another metaphor  
is a flowering plant with its deep, invisible root,  
its green stem reaching into the world from that root,  
and its flower (Spirit\_ which opens to spread beauty and fragrance and  
to fructify the earth with fruit and seed.  
And it is all the one living plant.

Hildegard of Bingen, a medieval woman mystic,  
spun a rich tapestry of images of the Spirit:  
a burning fire who spark, ignites, inflames, kindles hearts;  
as guide in the fog;  
a balm for wounds;  
a shining serenity;  
an overflowing fountain that spreads to all sides.  
She is life, movement, color, radiance,  
restorative stillness in the din.  
Her power makes all withered sticks and souls green again with the juice of life.  
She purifies, absolves, strengthens, heals, gathers the perplexed, seeks the lost.  
She pours the juice of contrition into hardened hearts.  
She plays music in the soul,  
being herself the melody of praise and joy.  
She awakens mighty hope, blowing everywhere the winds of renewal in creation.

However we speak of the Spirit,  
we are trying to describe God's drawing near and passing by  
in life-giving, sustaining, renewing and liberating power  
in the midst of historical struggle.

We see the Spirit's work in the creation around us.  
When that creation is threatened – by oil spills or overflowing garbage,  
by air pollution and climate change –  
it is the Spirit who calls us to repentance and action.

We see the Spirit's work in the renewing of social structures.  
When Martin Luther King preached "I have a dream"  
and millions walked peacefully but purposefully  
in the streets for the civil rights of black Americans,  
it was the Spirit calling for repentance and justice.  
When women in Canada worked for recognition  
as "persons" under the law, able to vote,  
it was the Spirit calling for repentance and justice.  
When well-qualified immigrants to Canada  
ask for the acceptance of their qualifications and experience,  
it is the Spirit calling us to justice and community.  
When people who are gay or lesbian  
speak of their loving relationships and ask they be recognized,  
it is the Spirit calling us to justice and community.  
The Song of Faith says:  
"We sing of God the Spirit,  
faithful and untameable,  
who is creatively and redemptively active in the world."

We see the Spirit's work in the human longing for the holiness of God.  
When religions speak of God,  
help us approach the mystery of God in story and ritual,  
help us honour one another in that community of God,  
it is the Spirit at work through the religions of the world.  
The Song of Faith says,  
"The Spirit challenges us to celebrate the holy  
not only in what is familiar,  
but also in that which seems foreign."

And when the Spirit led Jesus in the wilderness for forty days.  
There he fasted and prayed.  
There he faced temptation.  
When he returned from this exile  
his opening words in his hometown synagogue  
point to the empowerment of the Spirit in his call:  
*"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,  
because he has anointed me  
to bring good news to the poor.  
He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives  
and recovery of sight to the blind,  
to let the oppressed go free,  
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour." (Luke 4:18)*

Jesus is a Spirit-filled preacher and healer.  
His solidarity with the poor leads to confrontation  
with the temple and Roman authorities,

leads to his terrible death on the cross.

Through the life-giving, creative power of the Spirit  
this crucified victim of state terror is raised from the dead into glory,  
an act of new creation.

The risen Christ becomes a life-giving spirit for others  
and the church is born.

Spirit-filled, the church is called to the work of Jesus –  
bringing good news, freeing captives and healing.

The Spirit is present to believers and to the believing community.

She teaches and helps us hear scripture.

She guides us into truth in the complexities of our history.

She empowers mission, inspiring us to share with others  
the story of Jesus.

She is especially present when the community of believers,  
the church, its congregations,

when we are built up in joy and justice.

Although we are diverse, we are conscious of ourselves  
as one in the Spirit since all have been baptized in the waters of the Spirit.

Even as we struggle to be community for one another,

the Spirit helps us bear the fruits of

love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,  
gentleness and self-control.

We live and follow Christ because the Spirit give us life.

As so we sing.

“We sing of the Spirit,

who speaks our prayers of deepest longing

and enfolds our concerns and confessions,

transforming us and the world.”

Thanks be to God.

Rev. Diane Blanchard

Carlisle and Kilbride United Churches