

The Reverend Marjo Anderson

**Trinity Sunday
John 3:1-17**

**30 May 2021
Salem, Bridgeport**

“Riding High on the Wind of the Spirit”

She was riding high on the wind of the Spirit!
She had seen the risen Christ and had come back to faith!
She had done great work as an intern over the past year and a half,
re-structuring their Sunday school, starting a vacation Bible school,
developing an impressive youth ministry program,
and starting a young adults group,
in addition to her worship and music and pastoral care responsibilities.
And now that she actually believed in God, she loved her work even more!
Yes, she was riding high on the wind of the Spirit!
And so were all of the children and youth and young adults and parents who were working with her.

So it came as a complete shock when later that month at Council meeting,
the pastor said, “Finance committee has decided that in order to solve the budget shortfall,
we need to terminate the internship position”.
She wasn’t the only one in shock. Everyone had been taken aback.
When the vote was taken, the pastor voted for terminating the position, and everybody else voted against.
They said to the pastor,
“Go back to the finance committee and tell them to come back with an alternative solution”.

In May, the pastor came back to Council and said,
“The finance committee says there is no other option – we must terminate the internship position”.
That time the motion was defeated seven to five, and it was decided to discuss the matter again in June.

But she had a problem with the June meeting.
She was scheduled to travel back to her home state
to attend her synod convention and be approved for ordination.
She could leave right after that and get back in time for the Council meeting,
but then she wouldn’t get to spend any time with her parents.
She prayed and she felt the Spirit whisper in her ear, “Go. Leave the meeting in God’s hands”.
So she went.

It was a Spirit-filled convention!
The theme was “Born Anew”, based on the text in John about Nicodemus.
As you entered you were given a pin with a little squiggly caterpillar
made of a rolled up pipe cleaner with googly eyes, as a symbol of new life.
And there was a theme song, with the new lyrics “Born Anew” set to a familiar tune.
There was so much excitement enthusiasm in the place it was palpable!
You could just feel the Spirit’s presence!

And then at the convention she was approved for ordination!
And again she was riding high on the wind of the Spirit,
knowing it was carrying her further down the path God had laid out for her.

On her drive back to her parents' house, the Spirit blew into her ear a new song...

"Be still and know that I am God. Be still and know that I am God.

Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Be still and know that I am God."

She wasn't writing the song; it was just coming to her!

A second verse came...

"God gave the Son for us in love. God gave the Son for us in love.

Dying upon the tree, Christ rose to set us free. God gave the Son for us in love."

Obviously the song she was being given was about the Trinity –

verse one about the God the Father, verse two about the Son.

Verse 3 began flowing into her...

"Make me a channel of your grace."

Wait! That verse should be about the Spirit.

She tried to write different words, but the words coming into her mind were insistent.

"Make me a channel of your grace.

Pour your love into me and let it flow through me. Make me a channel of your grace."

Never before had a song been downloaded into her! What an extraordinary gift!

Again, she was riding high on the wind of the Spirit!

The next night was the council meeting which she would not be attending,

and fear gripped her and dragged her down.

She decided she would pray throughout the meeting until someone called her with the results.

She went into the little bathroom and huddled in the corner on the floor and prayed,

just like she had as a child.

She prayed first that she could keep her job, but something didn't feel right about that,

and finally she felt that she needed to pray a different prayer: May God's will be done.

She played it over and over and over again: May God's will be done.

She kept praying and praying, waiting for the phone to ring, but it didn't ring that night,

Nor did it ring the next day. Or the next. Or the next.

Finally it was time for her to make the long drive home.

When she arrived there was no message. No one had called.

It was now Saturday night and she wasn't sure whether she had a job to return to.

Should she show up or not?

What if she showed up and she didn't have a job?

Finally she called a friend, the same friend in whom she had glimpsed the risen Christ.

He said, "No one called you?! I can't believe no one called you! I'm so sorry.

And I'm even sorrier to tell you that they voted to terminate your job in 2 weeks".

She got off the phone right away so he wouldn't hear her sobs.

The next morning as she drove to church

she was filled with anxiety and fear and hurt and resentment and anger.

How could she go and face those people? She couldn't. She just couldn't.

And so she cried out to God and said,

"God, I can't do this! I can't do this on my own! Help me!"

And immediately, she was filled with a peace like she had never known before,

a peace so vast and so deep and so wide, it was like a perfectly still lake.

Understanding and empathy and love **POURED** into her, flooding every cell of her being.

When she walked into that church she felt as if she were pure grace.

Again, she was riding high on the wind of the Spirit!

At our pastors' text study this week Pastor Beth asked,

"Can you be baptized by water and the Spirit more than once?"

Pastor Mark replied, “Well, Luther said, ‘Remember your baptism daily!’
But the trouble with that is that most of us cannot actually remember our baptism.

We can remember that we have been told we were baptized,
but we cannot remember our actual baptism

And yet, the word “remember” in Greek, is “anamnesis”,
which means to relive something over and over and over again
as if it were actually happening in the present moment.

When Jewish people celebrate the Passover, they are not remembering an historical event,
but believing that it is happening right now in the present moment.

When Christians celebrate Communion, we are not remembering an historical event,
but believing that it is happening right now in the present moment.

That story I told about the intern was my story.

Throughout that story, I was “baptized by the Spirit” again and again and again –
in glimpsing the risen Christ,
in being led to put the outcome of the Council meeting in God’s hands,
in the Born Anew theme of the synod convention,
in my approval for ordination,
in the gift of the song,
in the gifts of peace and grace that God poured into me so I could walk into that church,
and finally, once again, nearly 40 years later.

For as I was recalling that story this week I realized for the very first time
WHY the Spirit had given me those very words.

As I cried out to God as I prepared to face my congregation that Sunday morning,
God did exactly what the song had said.

“Be still and know that I am God. Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you.”

God gave me a peace that passed all human understanding that day

“Make me a channel of your grace. Pour your love into me and let it flow through me.”

God poured love and grace into me that morning.

I didn’t want to leave that church.

I was comfortable with the way things were.

But God’s Spirit called me out of what was comfortable and familiar and safe into the great unknown.

It wasn’t easy. It wasn’t pleasant. It wasn’t something that I would have chosen to do.

But the Spirit blows where it will.

And if we want to ride on the wind of the Spirit we have to let go of the past.

We have to let go of the old, the familiar, the cherished,
and dance or leap or step hesitatingly into the unknown.

The Spirit cannot be contained or confined or bound to particular songs or hymns or liturgies.

The Spirit cannot be bound to rituals or routines or habits.

The Spirit does not live in the past and the Spirit does not stay still in the present.

The Spirit is constantly blowing, moving, sweeping us out of our comfortable, familiar, predictable places,
leaving us grieving, and feeling lost and alone, IN ORDER to take us to that place of abundant joy.

You can’t have it any other way.

We cannot stay still and expect the Spirit to stay with us. The Spirit blows where it will.

We can stand our ground, we can nail the church down,
but the Spirit will simply blow over us or around us or between us.

We can ignore it and hope it goes away without causing too much damage, or we can be born anew.

If we want life, if we want abundance, if we want joy, we cannot stand still—& we certainly can’t go backward!

Rather, we can chase the wind, we can dance with the Lord, and we can ride on the wind of the Spirit of God!

May the God of Water, Wind & Flame, the Life-Giver, Pain-Bearer, Love-Maker, the Creator, Redeemer, Sustainer,
move through our bodies, light up our minds, burn in our hearts, & dance in our Spirits! Amen & Amen & Amen!