

## Alive: Moving with the Spirit

### Galatians 5:16-25

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Over spring break Nancy and I spent a few days in Playa del Carmen, just south of Cancun, Mexico. There's nothing quite like digging your toes into warm sand after a long Minnesota winter. While there were a lot of things that I enjoyed about our brief vacation, one of the things I especially enjoyed was sitting on the beach and watching the kite surfers do their thing. If you're not familiar with kite surfing its this amazing combination of flying a gigantic kite while riding a modified surfboard. Developed in the 1970's, kitesurfing has become incredibly popular wherever wind and water come together. Watching these athletes harness the wind, glide across the water at incredible speeds and then launch off a wave twenty feet into the air is magical. My wife, Nancy, was so enthralled that she took a three-hour lesson, only to learn that it actually takes six hours of instruction to truly kitesurf. After three hours all you get to do is something called "body dragging" which is about as "magical" as it sounds!

After Jesus' resurrection and ascension, as the early Church began to understand what it means to be the body of Christ in the world, they realized that the Holy Spirit was the power of God to animate and move them into mission. On the day of Pentecost, which we celebrated last weekend, Scripture says that the disciples experienced the Holy Spirit as a mighty wind. And that shouldn't have surprised them. Their own Scriptures often used the metaphor of wind or breath to describe the Spirit. In Genesis, it says that at the time of creation the Spirit hovered like a wind over the watery chaos. And in the creation story, God breathed into the dust of the ground to animate humanity. And when Jesus sought to describe the Spirit life to a Pharisee named Nicodemus he said, "You know well enough how the wind blows this way and that. You hear it rustling through the trees, but you have no idea where it comes from or where it's headed next. That's the way it is with everyone 'born from above' by the wind of God, the Spirit of God."

So, God's Spirit is the animating force in a disciples' life, the power to move us into mission. But wind also has the power to shape things. The Antelope Canyons in Arizona are stunning and unique in their beauty. And they weren't shaped by water as most canyons are. These canyons were shaped by the wind.

And just as the wind shaped those canyons, the wind of the Spirit shapes our lives more and more into the likeness of Jesus. St. Paul had a metaphor for that process. He called it the Fruit of the Spirit and he describes it in our Scripture reading for today from a letter to the Galatians 5:16-25:

*<sup>16</sup> So I say, let the Holy Spirit guide your lives. Then you won't be doing what your sinful nature craves. <sup>17</sup> The sinful nature wants to do evil, which is just the opposite of what the Spirit wants. And the Spirit gives us desires that are the opposite of what the sinful nature desires. These two forces are constantly fighting each other, so you are not free to carry out your good intentions.*

*<sup>18</sup> But when you are directed by the Spirit, you are not under obligation to the law of Moses.*

*<sup>19</sup> When you follow the desires of your sinful nature, the results are very clear: sexual immorality, impurity, lustful pleasures, <sup>20</sup> idolatry, sorcery, hostility, quarreling, jealousy, outbursts of anger, selfish ambition, dissension, division, <sup>21</sup> envy, drunkenness, wild parties, and other sins like these. Let me tell you again, as I have before, that anyone living that sort of life will not inherit the Kingdom of God.*

*<sup>22</sup> But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, <sup>23</sup> gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against these things!*

*<sup>24</sup> Those who belong to Christ Jesus have nailed the passions and desires of their sinful nature to his cross and crucified them there. <sup>25</sup> Since we are living by the Spirit, let us follow the Spirit's leading in every part of our lives.*

This is the word of God for the people of God. Thanks be to God.

Wow, those are powerful words, and they are incredibly good news for those who want to be about Jesus' mission in daily life. Paul says that the Spirit is at work in our lives, chipping away at old habits and attitudes and shaping our hearts and our minds to align with the heart and mind of Jesus. Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness... all of these things describe

the way we see Jesus during his earthly life, and how we want to see our own lives.

You may wonder, “How does that happen? How does the Spirit give birth to that kind of fruit in my life?” That’s a great question. And I’ll answer it with another question, “How does a tree branch bear fruit?” Honestly, I have no idea. I just know that as long as the branches on the apple tree in my back yard stay connected to the tree, they bear fruit. They don’t have to work at. They don’t earn it. It just happens. And I think that’s true in our faith life. It’s why Jesus said, “I am the vine; you are the branches. Those who remain in me, and I in them, will produce much fruit. For apart from me you can do nothing.” Another translation says, “abide in me” or “dwell in me.” That’s why we called our Lenten Worship Series “Dwell.” Remember that series? We wanted to equip you to learn to dwell or abide in the vine, the living presence of the Spirit in our lives.

But what I really want to focus on today are these words from today’s Scripture reading, “Let us follow the Spirit’s leading in every part of our lives.”

The wind can be blowing, but if your sail isn’t raised, you won’t go far. You can be surrounded by oxygen, but if you don’t breathe, it won’t do you any good. The sap can be flowing, but if a branch isn’t connected to the tree or the vine, nothing grows. In the same way, the Spirit is always present in us and around us, but we still need to learn how to let the Spirit move in us. When my wife, Nancy, took that kite surfing lesson, she spent most of that time learning how to get that kite into the wind. So, if we think of ourselves as spirit-kites, how do we learn to set our sail like a kite or a sail to harness the wind of the Spirit?

You could start when you wake up tomorrow morning. Before your feet hit the floor, open your heart to the Spirit. Ask God to help you to move with the Spirit through the day. Ask God to help you dwell in the vine so good fruit will naturally develop in your life. As you build that habit of yielding yourself to the Spirit throughout your day, you can build the habit of checking in with the Spirit hour by hour throughout the day. At each mealtime, you can offer a prayer of thanksgiving and you can reconnect with the Spirit. As you travel from place to place, as you wait for someone, whenever you have a free moment, you can offer yourself to God: “Here I am, Lord. Please move in me and through me to be a blessing to others.” Whenever an emergency or challenge arises, you can lean into the Spirit by praying, “Give me wisdom,

Spirit of God. Give me strength. Give me patience.”

When you sense that you’ve let something other than God’s Spirit fill you and direct you— anger, fear, prejudice, lust, greed, anxiety, pride – you can stop in that moment and acknowledge that you’ve turned in a way that no longer catches the wind of the Spirit. Then re-surrender yourself again. And at the end of the day, you can look back with gratitude, resting in the Spirit until a new day begins and you start all over again.

And here’s the cool part. When a kite surfer has their kite set into the wind, they move effortlessly wherever the wind takes them. They glide and fly as if by magic in graceful movements that captivate those who watch them. And I’d suggest to you that the same thing is true of our lives. Practice catching the wind of the Spirit and your life will move in ways that capture the attention of others and give glory to the maker of the wind.

Let’s pray...