

*“The voice of the Lord is upon the waters...the Lord is upon the mighty waters.”*

—Psalm 29

There is a temptation to say too much about this Feast of our Lord’s Baptism. The texts of the lessons speak mightily for themselves: The spirit-wind of God and God’s voice is upon the mighty waters in Creation. The spirit-wind of God and God’s voice was upon the mighty waters of those at Ephesus, and within the mighty waters of our own baptism, just as this spirit-wind and voice was upon the waters of the River Jordan at our Lord’s baptism. The spirit-wind of God is upon every baptism which takes place here and everywhere.

How many of us find ourselves like the disciples depicted in Acts, Chapter 19? When asked if we have received the Holy Spirit, might we too respond, “No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit”?

*“The voice of the Lord is upon the waters...the Lord is upon the mighty waters.”*

Sufficient here just in the Psalm I think for all us to sit up and take notice!!!

The spirit wind of God was there, sweeping across the face of the waters in the very beginning.

There is a problem of translation here. Translating the Hebrew “*ruah*” (rue-ah) as “a wind” just does not do justice to the Biblical text, let alone the Judeo-Christian tradition. ‘Wind’ sounds rather limp-wristed...this entity is creative, forceful, powerful, energising...once and for all and yet renewable.

As it sweeps across the untamed and chaotic waters of creation, it is a mighty wind releasing into the world a specific force that is linked to the God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Jesus, and to us in baptism but which is invisible, inexplicable, and irresistible.

This word Spirit is an attempt to speak about Israel's conviction that the world is God's arena of governance, and in the end beyond human explanation or control. . . a world subject to God with which, in the end, he can do with as he wills.

And this word Spirit is often seen to be a gift of imaginative freedom through which all members of the community of faith are capable of a broadness of future beyond all present circumstances and beyond all human expectations. Spirit is God's active involvement to move us through continued hope to a new future...sometimes a future as unexpected as it may be welcome.

I am a great planner...but I am often caught out by one of my infinite collection of quotes:

“The Spirit resists being put into a flow chart or any schematic design on our part.” - so Walter Brueggemann slyly observed in his book *Reverberations of Faith*,

I am absolutely convinced that alongside all our planning and wishing for wholeness and fulfilment in life, God has that in store for us which has the facility of a greater surprise and a greater fulfilment than we could ever imagine. In a rather pedestrian way, even the spirit filled person of faith has the temptation to the known, the safe, the controlled, the expected, even when the same is unfulfilling, unsatisfactory, sometimes wholly awful.

It is this Spirit, this *ruah*, that Jesus later says comes from we know not where, and means to carry us to we know not where...but I suspect it to be a place further, more exciting, happier and more fulfilling than ever we first imagined.

Perhaps this is the beginning of our ignorance of God's Spirit. Having to give up human control, as Jesus asserts, is not one of our primary attributes or desires. Anything that demands our giving up control is something we generally feel we can do without...as such giving up interferes in human design, part of a

controlling humanity often seen in opposition to the will of the divine.

Reflect upon Jesus' baptism for just a moment. In Mark's gospel we see John hard at work managing a growing 'revival meeting' down on the banks of the River Jordan. People everywhere as far as one can see confessing their sins and accepting God's forgiveness. In some sense ordered, controlled... albeit new predictive and welcome.

Over the horizon, beyond anyone's sight or vision, strides onto stage the adult Jesus having walked all the way from Nazareth. Into the water he goes. As he comes up out of the water, the heavens do not just 'open', they are torn apart *schizomenos* – a word we will not hear again in Mark's Gospel until Jesus is on the cross, breathes his last *ruah*, and very connectedly, the curtain of the temple is torn in two, from top to bottom. Out of these torn apart heavens the Spirit-Wind, the Ruah of God, descends like a dove upon him. And a voice from heaven declares, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."

Try to see this all in your mind. Hear what it sounds like for the heavens to be torn apart (*schizomenos*). Hear what it sounds like. Listen carefully to the voice: You are my son, *the Beloved*; with you I am well pleased."

Hear those words spoken to you, to us in the power of the same Spirit. For Christ the words reflect his kingship and his destined suffering...what about us and in plain terms what about our *belovedness*? As we come up from the waters of our baptism, these words are meant for us: You are my Beloved; I am well pleased with you.

What would it be like to actually *accept* our belovedness? How would that feel? How would it feel to know, to really know deep inside in the most secret places of our being that God is

well pleased with us, as one infinitely loved, and despite all remaining an infinite loved one?

It is altogether likely that in growing up and as we say “maturing” that we were infected by the theology of a world where everything has to be earned, including our facility to be loved. The fact is that in God no such earning is in any sense real and is a real man-made illusion. Being beloved of God is a spiritual truth of God which we can so easily forget. We forget who we are and whose we are. Sadder still, we come to believe that this could not possibly be God’s word to me, here, now, today.

Yet, to forget this is to separate ourselves, our very core, from the love of God. And to separate oneself from the love of God is what the baptismal service calls sin. This is perhaps our most fundamental sin: to forget that we are God’s Beloved; that God is now fundamentally well pleased with us...not ‘will be’ or if we ‘play our cards right’ but now! Such forgetting is the beginning of so much that troubles us. But such forgetting makes it nearly impossible to follow and obey Christ as our Lord and Saviour in freedom and in joy.

It takes a conscious effort to remember who we are and whose we are. It takes daily reminders to accept our Belovedness. It takes daily remembering, a re-remembering, to internalize this Good News of our Baptism into a living force of God’s Spirit alive within us and beyond us.

Finally a short passage from Henri Nouwen’s little book, *Life of the Beloved*. Listen to these words with great inner attentiveness. At your centre is a voice that says:

I have called you by name, from the very beginning. You are mine and I am yours. You are my beloved, on you my favour rests. I have moulded you in the depths of the earth and knitted you together in your mother’s womb. I have carved you in the palms of my hands and hidden you in the shadow of my

embrace. I look at you with infinite tenderness and care for you with a care more intimate than that of a mother for her child. I have counted every hair on your head and guided you at every step. Wherever you go, I go with you, and wherever you rest, I keep watch. I will give you food that will satisfy all your hunger and drink that will satisfy all your thirst. I will not hide my face from you. You know me as your own as I know you as my own. You belong to me. I am your father, your mother, your brother, your sister, your lover, your spouse. Yes, even your child. Wherever you are I will be. Nothing will ever separate us. We are one.

Amen.