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Empowered by the Spirit

June 6-7, 2009

Isaiah 6:1-8

In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lofty; and the hem of the Holy One's robe filled the temple. Seraphs were in attendance above God; each had six wings: with two they covered their faces, and with two they covered their feet, and with two they flew. And one called to another and said: "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of God's glory." The foundations shook at the voices of those who called, and the house filled with smoke. And I said: "Woe is me! I am lost, for I am one of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips; yet my eyes have seen the Ruler of All, the LORD of hosts!" Then one of the seraphs flew to me, holding a live coal that had been taken from the altar with a pair of tongs. The seraph touched my mouth with it and said: "Now that this has touched your lips, your guilt has departed and your sin is blotted out." Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" And I said, "Here am I; send me!"

John 3:1-12

Now there was a Pharisee named Nicodemus, a leader of the Jews. Nicodemus came to Jesus by night and said, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God; for no one can do these signs that you do apart from the presence of God." Jesus answered, "Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above." Nicodemus said, "How can anyone be born after having grown old? Can one enter a second time into the mother's womb and be born?" Jesus answered, "Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit. What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not be astonished that I said to you, 'You must be born from above.' 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 who is born of the Spirit." Nicodemus said, "How can these things be?" Jesus answered, "Are you a teacher of Israel, and yet you do not understand these things? "Very truly, I tell you, we speak of what we know and testify to what we have seen; yet you do not receive our testimony. If I have told you about earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you about heavenly things?"



Wind, Spirit, Breath, Air—the same Hebrew word “ruach” is used for these terms and the same Greek term “pneuma” is used for these terms. The Spirit from Genesis through Acts connotes the Divine as an ordering power, as when a wind swept over the formless void and brought order from chaos or when God speaks to Moses simply saying “I AM!” The Spirit is a life-giving power, as when God breathed into humans the breath of life and we became more than dust. The Spirit connotes a guiding power, as in “on this one rests the Spirit of the Lord, a spirit of wisdom and insight, of counsel and power.” It connotes a healing power, as in “I shall put a new heart and a new spirit within you.” And the Spirit connotes a universal dimension, as in “I shall pour out my Spirit on all humankind—on sons and daughters, on slaves, men and women, I will pour out my spirit.” There is a power in God's Spirit. It is not a power to be tamed!

Let us pray: Powerful wind, breath, spirit empower us to be your servants in this time and in this place. Amen.

There is a power in God's Spirit – it is not a power to be tamed. It is kind of like kite flying – you have to appreciate the wind, you have to work with it, you can enjoy it, you can let it enthuse you and entertain you, but you certainly aren't about to tame the wind!

Like author Elizabeth Wells, I see similarities between the act of flying a kite and our human and spiritual journey toward resurrection. It also resembles our hope and desire to be caught by God's love and lifted to heights unimaginable.

Anyone who's flown a kite knows they don't typically go up in a straight line. They meander, left and right—even in loops.

Which reminds me of the other famous Ben Franklin kite story—it seems that once when Ben was attempting to prove the existence of electricity with his kite experiment, his kite kept crashing to the ground. His wife, watching from a second-story window, threw back the shutters and shouted down to the great statesman: "Hey Ben, I think you need a little more tail." To which Franklin retorted: "I tried to tell you that last night and you told me to 'go fly a kite!'" So flying a kite can sometimes be frustrating.

The spiritual journey can feel like this. There are times when I become complacent. I get weary and it becomes blasé. The kite, or my faith walk, continues but lacks heart. Things can fall because I am not paying attention. Catching

the wind is tricky business, an exercise in faith. The force of a gentle breeze or strong blast cannot be seen. The outstretched flag or swaying trees prove that the wind exists because they have been touched. It reminds me that we are called to give proof of God's existence. That's part of being empowered by the Spirit.

Sometimes the wind, without warning, seems to disappear completely, and the kite falls. Quick tugs on the string may reconnect it to the wind. Other times a full-scale sprint in the opposite direction is necessary. Sometimes nothing can be done to alter the course. It can be frustrating.

The wind, like God's presence, can seem to be everywhere except where I am. Others seem to be sailing along effortlessly. These are times I must return to the beginning. I need to check my position, angle, speed, then wait again at the taut-string stage. When the kite returns to the air, I'm filled with wonder and hope.

Gail Pool says that "Even with the best of maps and instruments, we can never fully chart our journeys." The good news is, however, no matter how challenging the journey, we never travel alone. Just sit still for a moment. Breathe in. Breathe in the love of the Divine that surrounds us all. Breathe out. Breathe out and share that same love with everyone around you.

Then take the next step on your journey...

Kite-flying can also be a metaphor of the need for community. Releasing a kite can be done solo but is easier with another's help. Even as the string is stretched taut between the one who will gently toss the kite into the wind and the one holding the reel, excitement seems to travel down the line. It's play, but everyone sees the benefits of bearing one another's burdens.*

"I am." is the shortest complete sentence in the English language. Noun, verb. I am—What? The shortest sentence in the English language is both a statement and a question. The shortest sentence in the English language is one of the most important questions that you will ever answer. God told Moses God's name is "I am." God knew who God is. We usually become that which we envision ourselves to be. It's a short question with a long answer. It's a short statement with a lifelong impact. I am. Yes, you are. What? ... That's up to you.

Being empowered by God's Spirit occurs frequently in community, particularly when we don't take ourselves too seriously, when we rely on our line to God, and when we look up and let our imaginations soar! Every time and every moment we choose to love, we fly our kites, we free our spirits, we become connected and empowered by the Spirit. Some say that single words such as "So?" or "Go!" are sentences. That can be validly argued but as for sentences with a subject and verb, "I am." has the distinction of being the shortest sentence.

I am.

So?

Go!

**Adapted from Elizabeth Wells, Kite rite: looking for a good metaphor for the spiritual journey this Lent and Easter? Go fly a kite!, 2006.*