

The Spirit of God is moving

Genesis 1:1-5

January 11, 2009

In the beginning, when God created the universe, the earth was formless and desolate. The raging ocean that covered everything was engulfed in total darkness, and the Spirit of God was moving over the water ...

The Spirit of God was moving over the water. The Spirit of God was moving over the water. The Spirit of God was moving ...

Then God commanded, "Let there be light!" And light appeared ...

The Spirit of God was moving! The Spirit of God was moving over the water! The mighty wind of God's Spirit was blowing over the raging ocean! The dynamic power of the Holy Spirit was let loose over the desolate waste! The Spirit of God was moving, bringing order and beauty out of chaos, bringing light into the darkness, bringing life ... to life!

The Spirit of God was moving. That's what the Spirit of God does. It moves!

God's Spirit is not inert or unmoving or static, eternally existing somewhere out there, somewhere outside time and space. God's Spirit is not distant or aloof or imperceptible, away from us, apart from us. It moves. The Spirit of God is living, moving, dynamic, connected, involved, even intrusive. It comes close to us, brushes up against us, blows through us, breathes into us.

This is the Spirit, the Holy Spirit, to which the United Church of Christ Statement of Faith testifies. The UCC Statement of Faith is solidly trinitarian in its theology. But it is not so much trinitarian theology that matters, working out a proper understanding of the relationships among God the Father and God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. No, it is not trinitarian theology that matters, but trinitarian language, giving us a full appreciation of the ways we can and do experience the presence of the living God.

We believe in you, O God, Eternal Spirit ...

There is God, eternal, existing not as body but as spirit, glorious, mysterious, mighty, utterly beyond us, inspiring awe and wonder and humility! But it may be easy to keep this God at arm's length, to protest that this God is too far, too shrouded in mystery, too other, to be known. We may be content to wonder about God, to speculate about what God may be like, to search for signs of God, to dream our own thoughts of God, and, in the meanwhile, just get on with our lives.

But we believe God comes to us!

In Jesus Christ, the man of Nazareth, you have come to us ...

Jesus makes God particular. Jesus makes God touchable, knowable. Jesus bring God into reach. Jesus says this and not that. Jesus does this and not that. Jesus makes God particular, showing us who God is, showing us the way. There is no more room for idle speculation, no more time for leisurely wondering about God. There it is! We cannot ignore Jesus, but must choose, choose to follow him, or choose to turn and go our own way.

But even in Jesus, God is yet at some distance from us, standing there, standing opposite us, approaching us, comforting us, healing us, forgiving us, then moving away and calling us to follow.

You bestow upon us your Holy Spirit ...

God is upon us! God is in us! God is with us! This is God moving, creating, renewing, not over there, but in here, not in a way we may observe, but in a way we can feel, a way that involves us, catches us up, moves us along.

That's why, I think, we may be uncomfortable talking about the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit brings God ... too close? We may ignore God. We cannot ignore Jesus, but we may choose to turn away, to go our own way. But we may neither ignore nor turn away from the Holy Spirit! The Holy Spirit is there, pressing on us, blowing on us, moving in on us. This is the God we have to deal with. The only other recourse we have is to resist, to resist the power of the Spirit of God in our lives.

But it is the Spirit that brings us to life.

You bestow upon us your Holy Spirit, creating and renewing the church of Jesus Christ ...

We heard the story in Acts about Paul's encounter with a group of believers in Ephesus. It is, in many ways, a strange story, talking about two different baptisms: John's baptism and baptism in the name of the Lord Jesus, seemingly intimating that there are levels or stages of belief, and that some believers may not yet be filled with the Spirit. Some Christian sects have exploited this text and others like it to make that precise point, that unless and until you are baptized in the Holy Spirit, you are somehow less a Christian, less complete, and that such baptism is a unique and distinctive event, separate from and other than water baptism.

But I think it is unwarranted to press the details of the story and fashion a theology out of them. The point of the story is the same point Luke makes throughout his gospel and the book of Acts: that it is the Spirit of God, the Holy Spirit, that brings the church to life! The gift of the Spirit is bestowed on these dozen believers when Paul lays his hands on them, and they come to life. They come to life, speaking in wonderfully new ways and proclaiming the message of God's faithfulness and goodness and salvation. They become the church, part of the church of Jesus Christ.

You bestow upon us your Holy Spirit, creating and renewing the church of Jesus Christ ...

The church is God's creation, not ours. We don't make the church into what it is or hope to make it what it can be. We invite God's Spirit in. We let God's Spirit create and lead and renew. We make the choice, not to resist, but to embrace the presence of God's Spirit among us.

And it is a church the Spirit creates. Just as the Spirit of God moved over the water and brought a world into being, a world complex and diverse and multi-layered, but, at the same time, an interconnected universe, one interconnected living organism, just so the Spirit of God moves over humanity, bringing a church into being, complex and diverse and multi-layered, but, at the same time, one, one church, one living community of the people of God.

In the beginning, when God created the church, the people of this earth were lost and confused. The dark cloud of fear and doubt and despair cast a deep shadow over everyone, but the Spirit of God was moving ...

The Spirit of God was moving! The mighty wind of God's Spirit was blowing over the clouds of fear and despair! The dynamic power of the Holy Spirit was let loose over the desolate wasteland! The Spirit of God was moving, bringing order and beauty out of chaos, bringing light into the darkness, bringing life ... Bringing life!

The Spirit of God is moving. The Spirit of God is moving now: among us, on us, in us. Will you resist it? Or will you embrace it? Will you be willing to let yourself go, to let yourself be, to let yourself be guided and comforted and gifted and used by God's Holy Spirit?

O breathe on me, breath of God! Breathe on us! Blow the wind of your Spirit into our souls, into our bodies, into our body, into our church! Fill us! Renew us! Bring us to life!