

*Holy God, send Your Word, send Your Spirit, send Your love. Amen.*

Jesus never met a metaphor he couldn't use, it seems –  
though, to be fair, the only way to convey to limited human beings  
the truth and ways and priorities of God is through story and metaphor.  
It's kind of like us trying to use English to get through to our cats and dogs.  
Language doesn't work; they learn through our tone of voice and actions  
and patterns. So we learn about God through watching Jesus,  
and learning to discern his presence among us now.  
But we don't get it straight.

In the short gospel readings we heard this morning,  
we see Jesus using two metaphors for the Holy Spirit: wind and water.  
How is the Holy Spirit like wind?  
We don't see the Spirit; we feel the Spirit. We see the effects of the Spirit.  
We can't control when or how the Spirit might blow through our lives,  
as a gentle breeze or hurricane-force gale.  
When we feel the wind or are aware of it, we can let that remind us of God.

Similarly Jesus likened the Spirit to streams of living water flowing out of  
the hearts of those who believe Jesus is Lord. Like that song we sing,  
“Let the river flow, let the river flow; Holy Spirit come, move in power.”  
How is the Holy Spirit like water? The Spirit can fill us, refresh us, cleanse us.  
Water can soothe us, or overwhelm, even drown us – it is not fully in our control.  
That river, friends, is already flowing. It is God's life, Christ's risen life,  
which comes to us through the Holy Spirit, and it flows through us.  
to every place and person in need of healing and restoration.  
The Spirit flows from us, but also all around us, a mighty stream flowing from  
God's throne; a healing stream, into which we can walk and splash and play  
and be healed. We need to step into that stream, to let it flow in and through us.  
When we encounter water, wild and free, we can let that remind us of God.

The ancient Celts also loved a metaphor – though maybe it wasn't even metaphor.  
It seems like God was so real to them in so many things, especially in nature.  
I am not an expert on Celtic Christianity but generously share from my shallow well.

When Christianity came to Celtic lands it met a people already deeply spiritual in what we might call natural religion – a sense that all things were imbued with spirit, a sense that the spirits of ancestors were not far, but all around, as were the spirits of wood and wildlife, wind and water, stone and land. They incorporated Christian story and doctrines into a faith that was lively, very Trinitarian, very focused on seeking protection from evil, and deeply aware of the presence of God in all things. In island lands often whipped by wind and surrounded by water, it was not a stretch to find God in those elements. Water was a gift and a danger, and also means of bringing their faith to others. The missionary voyages of St. Columba and Patrick and others spread this particularly lovely form of Christianity all around that part of the world. Follow the winds and the water.

The Celts were not alone in linking water to prayer... the ancient peoples of the Greco-Roman worlds and the Middle East did as well. When Paul arrives in the city of Philippi and wants to meet people who might be open to learning about Jesus, he says, “Let’s go to the river. There must be a place there where people pray.” And sure enough, they encounter a group of women there and began to talk with them about Jesus. They found a receptive ear in a businesswoman named Lydia, and then through her hospitality a base from which to operate in Macedonia. She became the anchor of the community of Gentile believers in Jesus in that place, which changed the character of Christianity. Follow the winds and the water.

I too find the water conducive to prayer. One of my voyages on my kayak up my creek takes me up a branch that branches off into further branches, and there’s a little cove with overhanging trees where there is usually some shade, and I always park myself there for some minutes and become still and pray. The water reminds me to pray.

We can find places and prompts for prayer anywhere. Not near the water? Go outside and feel the breeze and let it remind you of the Holy Spirit – start talking with it. Ask a tree or a rock how it might speak to you of God – it will. Seek God everywhere and in everything, and you will grow more like God. Summer is a great season to become aware of wind and water.

Our spiritual work is to become more and more familiar with that breath of God,  
with living water flowing through us.

Then we can invite others into that stream.

Then we become those pools in which others can find healing.

We become rivers with places of prayer along our banks, places where  
the spiritually thirsty can connect with the fiercely accepting love of Jesus.

Seek God in wind and water, and the Spirit of God will find you,  
in the wind and the water.

**Amen.**

**John 3:5-8**

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.'

**John 7:37-39**

On the last day of the festival, the great day, while Jesus was standing there, he cried out, 'Let anyone who is thirsty come to me, and let the one who believes in me drink. As the scripture has said, "Out of the believer's heart shall flow rivers of living water.'" 'Now he said this about the Spirit, which believers in him were to receive; for as yet there was no Spirit, because Jesus was not yet glorified.

**Acts 16:9-16**

During the night Paul had a vision: there stood a man of Macedonia pleading with him and saying, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." When he had seen the vision, we immediately tried to cross over to Macedonia, being convinced that God had called us to proclaim the good news to them. We set sail from Troas and took a straight course to Samothrace, the following day to Neapolis, and from there to Philippi, which is a leading city of the district of Macedonia and a Roman colony. We remained in this city for some days. On the sabbath day we went outside the gate by the river, where we supposed there was a place of prayer; and we sat down and spoke to the women who had gathered there. A certain woman named Lydia, a worshiper of God, was listening to us; she was from the city of Thyatira and a dealer in purple cloth. The Lord opened her heart to listen eagerly to what was said by Paul. When she and her household were baptized, she urged us, saying, "If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come and stay at my home." And she prevailed upon us.