

**Sermon on Genesis 1:1-5 and Mark 1:1-11**  
**Susan Verbrugge**  
**Blacksburg Presbyterian Church**  
**January 11, 2009**

Do you ever have one of those days when you feel by the end of the day that you have aged several years? Well, don't feel bad. This week, Jesus has aged 30 years. Last Sunday, he was still a baby. Now, here he is, a thirty year old man, ready to begin his public ministry. It must have been a heck of a week for him!

We really don't know how Jesus spent the first 30 years of his life. He lived with his family, presumably observing Jewish customs and laws, worshipping in the temple, learning his father's trade as a carpenter. And now, here he is, wandering into the desert to see John, the one who has been proclaiming his coming. Others certainly don't know yet that he is the one John is pointing toward.

But, let's rewind for a minute. And, we have to rewind a long way at this point to go back to our Genesis passage, thousands and thousands of years, or maybe it's millions and millions of years, but that's another sermon.

Listen again to the first words from both of our passages today. From Genesis: "In the beginning, when God created" and from Mark: "The beginning of the Good News of Jesus Christ, the son of God." In each one, we find a beginning-a new start-. We also find water and God's Spirit showing up in a powerful way. We could read the Mark passage without the Genesis passage, and I suppose it would still have meaning and make sense. But when coupled together, the passages come alive in a whole new way.

In the beginning was God...in both passages. And in the beginning, God shows up in breath-taking and breath-giving ways. In the Genesis passage, God's spirit is blowing over the deep, creating order out of chaos, bringing life. It's not God's finger waving out over the chaos. It's not just God thinking it and order coming. It is God's breath, God's Spirit, blowing mightily and decisively over the deep, bringing life. God enters from a holy place and begins it all.

Breathtaking. Scary. Beautiful. Powerful. And only God's Spirit could do this, could bring this life, this incredible newness. In Walter Brueggemann's words, "The Spirit of God needs to be understood as the intrusive power for life that only God can command" (*Texts for Preaching*, Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993, 98). This is an incredible in-breaking of God for life. Nothing will ever be the same.

In the beginning of the Good News of Jesus Christ is God. Jesus goes to the river to be baptized by John. In coming up out of the water, again, God breaks into the world from a holy place. The Spirit of God descends from heaven and a voice is heard, "You are my Son, with you I am well pleased." Here again is the Spirit, powerful, awe-inspiring, life-giving, beginning something totally new. Here again is God, bringing life over the waters. Walter Brueggemann says, "The wind that blows at baptism is the same wind" again "making new life wondrously and inexplicably possible"(ibid, 98).

Sometimes, we make the Spirit of God into something very nebulous, very other-worldly. And sometimes, we make the Spirit of God into something nice, calm, peaceful, almost innocuous. But in both of these passages, the Spirit is neither of these. The Spirit is powerful. The Spirit is attention-getting. And, the Spirit is about bringing a radical change toward life.

In Genesis, before God's Spirit breathed and blew, there was no life, only chaos. In Mark, before the Spirit came down, Jesus was living his life one way. After he comes up out of the water, and the Spirit comes down from heaven, he changes the way he has been living. He goes from a man quietly going about his own life to a man in the public eye. He goes from a man who the authorities paid no attention to, to a man who is sought out and killed by them. He heals and teaches. He preaches and challenges. He reaches out to the world. Was this because the Spirit came down or was this predestined to happen? I don't think this is a question with an answer. But, I do think that what we can say is that the coming of the Spirit on him pointed to a remarkable change in Jesus' life.

So, the Spirit, other-worldly? Or the Spirit innocuous? I don't think so! The Spirit is this-worldly, breaking in, changing things, bringing new life. Blowing...and yes, sometimes blowing things over. Whipping around us and the world.

I suppose that the next question would be, how do we know when something is God's Spirit, and when it is just us trying to make it be a God thing? And, as usual, I don't have an answer for you. But, it seems to me in these passages that the Spirit is always about bringing new life. So, the first question we ask is a question of life, and not just life for me or for you, but for all people...God breaking out of God's holy place into our not so holy places to bring new life.

You know these places. You've experienced them in your own life, in this community's life, and in the life of the world. Let me tell you just one story as an example. I read this story in the Washington Post.

Bruce Reges is a retired teacher and a member of the Army Reserves. Now, he is a soldier in Iraq. One day, his unit went into a school there. The soldiers were only there to see how they could be helpful. But, they arrived in two armored vehicles and walked into the school in full body armor, with their guns in their hands. The children were terrified. Two of them tried to climb out the windows to escape. The others cowered. Reges was heartbroken that these children would be afraid of him, although he knew they had every right to be.

That night he e-mailed his 80 year old mother, who had worked in the public school system with disabled children. One of the things she introduced to the curriculum there was puppets. She made her own. So, Reges asked her for two puppets. He thought he could carry them in his cargo pocket and take them out to play with whenever he met a child. She sent him several.

The next time he came into contact with a child, he got down on the floor, took out the puppet and began to play. At first, the child was still scared, but slowly, she came out. Then, she reached for the puppet and began to play with it. The girl and the soldier connected. They

played. They became human together, humans from very different parts of the world, very different ages, very different lives, connecting in the middle of a war. That is life.

But, the story doesn't end there. The soldier left his puppet with that child. He quickly wrote to his mom that he needed more puppets, as many as she could send. She began sending them. Reges and his fellow soldiers, at least those who see the wonderful connections that can be made, always carry the puppets with them. Crossing the lines, reaching out, loving. The Spirit has descended.

God's work in this world is mind-boggling and beautiful.

So...can there be peace in the Middle East? Yes, for the Spirit blows there. Is there food for the hungry? Yes, because the Spirit blows there. Is there light within the hell of addiction? Yes, for the Spirit blows there. Is there hope in the halls of a hospital where a loved one lies dying? Yes, for the Spirit blows there. We don't always recognize the in-breaking of God's Spirit, but it is there, always creating new life.

We, as a community, are called into being by God's Spirit. We are baptized into the community of Jesus Christ. The Spirit broods over the waters and brings order out of our chaos, brings life out of our deadness. The Spirit blows this community out into the world to live and work in the way of Jesus Christ, into love, into servanthood, into hope.

The Spirit is hovering over us, beckoning us. So let us follow. Let us be blown into life. Amen.