

Calvary United Methodist Church  
January 30, 2011

**BLOW BY BLOW**  
**Rev. Dr. S. Ronald Parks**



Children's Sermon      Psalm 139 (Adapted)

God's gifts are freely given and on display in this house of his peace. We welcome the children to the front of this worship space to celebrate the good news that God has given to us.

It's good to see everybody this morning. How are you?



I want to show you a picture of my very first Sunday School teacher and see if you recognize him. Now I call Elvis my very first Sunday School teacher because Elvis set it to a song. It's a song called *Somebody Bigger than You and I*. Have you heard that song? (Pastor asks the congregation if they have ever heard that song.) I thought you had because this was released in the late 50's when I was just a wee thing. I was about four years old and my grandmother had this record album by Elvis of a lot of Gospel favorites. This song was on it. As I listened to it, it sort of got me thinking about God and about maybe something that might be possible for me. Let me share with you the words of the song without actually singing the song because I can read them faster than they can be sung.

You can answer these questions if you want. Actually the song is just a series of questions.

Who made the mountains? Who made the trees?

God did—exactly right. Here's another question

(After each question the kids answer "God.")

Who made the rivers flow to the sea?  
Who sends the rain when the earth is dry?

God is somebody bigger than you and I.

Who made the flowers to bloom in the spring?  
Who made the song for the robins to sing?  
Who hung the moon in the starry sky?  
Who is somebody bigger than you and I?

He lights the way when the road is long.  
He keeps you company and with his love to guide you  
He walks beside you just like he walks with me.

When I am weary, filled with despair  
Who gives me courage to go on from there?  
Who gives me faith that will never die?  
Somebody bigger than you and I.

So I got to thinking as a four year old listening to that song over and over again; God is kind of like me except God is just bigger.

As I was four years old and thinking about this song that Elvis was singing to me about somebody bigger than you and I, I got to thinking maybe I could be God, except I'd have to get bigger.

(Pastor puts up a ladder.) Let me tell you the way that kind of sounded to me as I was a little one. Dude, would be willing to give me a hand. You are such a big help I wanted to make sure you had a chance to share in this sermon a little bit. Now I thought it might be kind of fun, rather than for me to just tell you how I could be God to just kind of show you. Step up on the ladder as far as you feel comfortable going. (Little boy goes up to about the fourth step.)

Do you know what I thought? I thought I could be God if only I lived up higher because God is typically thought of, as least by Chil-



dren, to be up in the sky. Do you feel like God? (Little boy says “No.”)



Then I thought maybe I could be God if I could find a way to get a bigger heart because I know God has a lot to say about loving other people. (Pastor puts a large inflatable heart around the boy's head.) Do you feel like God yet? Nobody wants to be uncomfortable in church. Would you rather sit down? Would anybody else like to get up here and help me out? So I felt if I had a bigger heart maybe I would look more like God. (Pastor put the inflatable heart around his neck.) Do I look like God yet? Of course not.



Then I thought that one of the things that makes God is that God has a really big brain because God knows everything. So all I needed was a bigger brain. (Pastor puts on an inflatable brain.) Big heart, big brain, just like God. Right? No.



Then I thought what else is it that God is sort of about? God has a lot more power than I do. So what I need is a way to get more things done. (Pastor has inflatable arms with very long hands and fingers.) When I was four years old this is what I needed to do. Lift up high, have a big heart because he loves everybody, have a big head because he knows everything and have these real big hands because all the stories I read in the Bible talks about him touching stuff and things happen. So if I could just have bigger hands, bigger brain, bigger heart and lived a little higher off the ground I can be just like God. Did I make it? No. I'm not anything like God, not at all. My children and spouse tell me this on a regular basis that I don't have any power, I don't really know too much and, frankly, I care more about me than about anybody else so my heart never really got all that big.



That's the reality—we are not God. Psalm 139 reminds us of that truth.

Oh God, you are awesome! Your thoughts are bigger than mine. Your power is greater than mine. Your love is deeper than mine. I'll never understand the mystery that is you. That's why I worship you. That's why I praise your name.

That's why this place exists. Because God is something so much larger, so much more powerful and loving than we are. This place is a symbol of our love for God. That's why we love it. God has not only taught me about his love he has put it in my heart.

That's why I love you with my heart, mind, and hands. You deserve all of me! I am yours.

That's one of the reasons God is so awesome. So how much bigger do I have to get to be God? Well, I'm not God and I'm not going to be God. It doesn't matter how big I get, no matter how smart I get, no matter how loving I am, there is still something very special that separates me from God.



God is not just bigger than me. God is totally different from me.

The mystery that is God is something I'll have to figure out the rest of my life. God is God and I am not. The differences between us are what people pray about and think about and study about their whole lifetimes.

All I know is that following Jesus is about as close as I can get to God. That's why we are all here this morning; to figure out how to follow Jesus and get closer to God. Not that we can be God but that we can be right next to God. Thanks for sharing in our time this morning.

## Message



(A video is played of a young girl running in a field. Her grandfather is with her and she sits down next to him. She questions where the wind comes from. The grandfather says the wind is a very old friend of his. The wind sings a song to you everyday just to you and it has one beautiful voice. If you close your eyes and listen hard you can hear it. You have to hold on to the wind because it will slip right through your fingers. But you see, my dear, I can't tell you where the wind comes from. I can only show you.)



Rauch; the Old Testament word for the Spirit of God that moves across the face of the in the first moment of creation. Spirit, wind, breath. These words are used to describe something which is beyond human understanding and ultimately beyond our ability to communicate with one another.

In the New Testament the same concept in Greek is captured by the word pneuma, what we now call spirit, air, motion. The whole concept of pneumatic technology where you pressurize air to push something, the whole idea of pneumonia where your air is constricted by the inflammation of certain tissues, this is where this comes from. More importantly it also means what happens at the first moment of creation.

It is the agent responsible for calling forth the Church of Jesus Christ from a bunch of scared disciples who have scattered whether or not their lives would be taken from them because of their allegiance to Christ. It is the pneuma, the rauch, the power and spirit of God that lifts them up out of the tomb with Christ.

No one was there to see what happened on Easter. No one can be sure how the spirit, the wind, the breath of God gives Christ his life



back in a new and glorious way. But we are all there at the birth of the church when that which was dead and life is brought back to life. The spirit, the breath, the wind of God, all of these things which are beyond our understanding and are beyond our expression, these are the source of our vitality in life. When God speaks and calls forth light, it is not long before he calls forth life and forms humanity from the dust of the earth and breathes into us the rauch, the pneuma, the spirit, the breath, the wind of creation.

Pneuma is vitality in life (blows). It is what you just experienced. But God is not content to bring forth light. Pneuma is also symbolic of this change that God is bringing in every moment and in every day. The only thing constant, we are told, is change. And that's because God continues to act. God did not act once and then just let things unfold. God is acting time and time again. As people of faith we confess that the new possibilities that come up out of our lives are because something has changed. People of faith realize that the agent of change in all things is the movement of God's spirit, the wind of God's grace, the breath of God's love.

But change is not just change for change sake. Change is for growth, creativity. God's pneuma, God's spirit, the wind and breath of God moves not only to bring forth life and vitality, not only to bring forth some kind of change but there is always the sense of creativity with God. Always bringing about the growth of what might be. Always realizing the potential. Always reaching out to make something real that is not yet real.

People of faith recognize that even in the most difficult of situations where things are changing in ways that we don't want them to change, that still there is God. Still there is the spirit. Still there is the wind and the breath of the one who brings all things into being. And once you see that, once you are able with the eyes of faith to understand the motion and the movement, the creativity and the vitality and the activity of God bringing forth change and growth and life, life starts over. It's a whole new game and in the New Testament we call that being born again.



Hear the story of Nicodemus, a man who questioned just how different one's life would be if you could really get a feel for what God was up to.

A Pharisee named Nicodemus came to Jesus at night

Why did he come to Jesus at night? Because he didn't want anybody to see him going to Jesus. Pharisees knew all there was to know about God. So to come to Jesus at night is an admission of I've got a question. You might be able to help me.

“Rabbi, we see by your words and deeds that you come from God.

Already he sees it. Already he is able to perceive that something is going on here that's not only vital and active by creativity in a way that causes people's faith, causes their eyes to see more clearly, to focus more sharply on what it is that God is doing.

Only God can do what you do.”

That's the nature of wisdom. The nature, the first act of the wise, is to recognize what I can do and what I can't do. Only God can do what Jesus was doing.

Jesus replied, “You're right. No one can see what God is doing unless they experience a second birth.

“That's impossible,” Nicodemus remarked. “You're born once.”

Anyone here not know your birth date? The date of your birth is momentous. It changes every life that you touch. And in a very real way it changes every life everywhere. You see the rose bud on the altar? You don't know that life yet but it has the power to change reality. You are born once, true.

Jesus answers, “Your human parents are responsible for your human birth. But God alone can recreate and deliver you into a new spiritual being. Remember Creation? The Spirit-wind

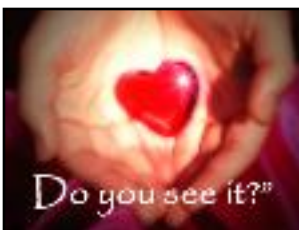
brought light and life from darkness and chaos. The same Spirit is birthing a new creation within you.

As we speak, there is a new creation being birthed in you. You are, by the grace of God, delivering forth a new creation, the person that God will cause you to be as things move forward in this day.

Think of the wind. You hear it. You hear it. You feel it. You watch the stirring of the leaves on the trees. Where did it come from? Where is it going? God only knows.

Is it going to snow again on Tuesday or Wednesday or this week? Have you already bought your milk and bread? You see, that's an act of faith. Somebody, somewhere said snow, I'm at the store. That's faith. What I hear, what I see, causes me to change. That's faith. Maybe if it snows hard enough the groundhog won't even get out of the hole. I don't know what happens if he doesn't see his shadow—the world will end.

You are able to sense what God is doing only in this moment.



Like the breath across my skin, it is momentary and it is gone. My awareness of what is doing is only for this moment. When I think back on other moments where I felt that spirit move I can see it more clearly because I've got a little more distance. But right here, right now, what God's spirit is doing in this moment it is all I can do and that's all. But the spirit is the same, that same spirit that moved in creation, the same spirit that called the disciples forth in life. That's the spirit that moves here, right here, right now.

Do you see it?



People of faith are committed to one thing. As those who are born again, we are committed to show the spirit, the indescribable, non-material presence of a living God to everyone we meet. That's what we are about. That's what Jesus was saying to Nicodemus. You already seeing what God can do by watching me. Let me show you what God can do. Keep watching. Keep thinking about what possibilities are unfolding before you. Celebrate your life. Celebrate the changes that God has in store. Celebrate the growth that we will experience.

Let me witness to his power and glory by telling you of my weakness and shame.

The best way for me to tell you what God can do is to share with you what I have failed to do in God's name. I can tell you about my lack of interest in forgiving. I can tell you about the selfish things I've done. And the reason I would share those things with you is because somehow in sharing it would show you what God can do that has given me the courage to tell you what I can do.

This is a place where people own their sins, where we own our limitations. We're not hiding behind the fact that we're not perfect people. We're not getting up on the ladder with a big brain, a big heart and a big hand and try to be something that we are not. We are simply saying that there is a God who is greater than I, whose love is beyond my understanding and because I'm not that I probably know better than anybody just what God can do.





Let me share with you his eternal truth with a voice that speaks only for a moment and more importantly only in a moment. What I'm saying to you right now, these words that are wafting over this air and landing on your ears; this is the spirit speaking in this moment. Next week, God willing, I'll have something more interesting to say, something more amusing, maybe something more entertaining. But the same spirit, the same truth, the same message. It's all the same. And I'll only get a chance to show it for a moment because I'm here today like the grass, like the leaves, like the flowers in the field and I'm gone tomorrow. So what I say now is the spirit speaking to me and I'll speak it as long as I have a voice and then it will be gone. And in that moment between the time when I breathe my first breath and the time when I breathe my last, I will look at every day as an opportunity to be born again: a second, third, four million and ninth verse where God speaks in me and brings me to life.

Let me show you the hand of the creator which brought forth such glory and wonder in these limp and worthless and impatient hands. I am a preacher of God. I can't do what God does but I understand the hand of God moving in me and around me and through me. I can't make your life something redemptive and something glorious but I can give you the gift that I have been given. The gift of the love and the good news of Christ. God recreated in you something that did not exist—joy.



And let me express his perfect love for you by loving you the way his son loves. Now I'm not going to do that right. There is going to be a lot of me in it and that's unfortunate for you. Because if I tell you I'm going to love you like Christ loved you and then I fail you, don't put it on Christ, put it on me. As a sinner I endeavor to show you what God has shown me but there is always me getting in the way. So thanks be to God for the ability to take me and put me aside.

I can't explain the spirit of God. I can't tell you all the reasons to give thanks and praise. I can't even identify for you all the ways in which I've seen what God can do is something that a treasure and hold. I can only show you and I'll show you as best as I can, for as long as I can in every way that I can; including standing on a ladder with an inflatable brain on my head. I'll do what I have to do to show it to you.

I want you to look at the video again and this time when you hear the word wind say to yourself spirit and think about that older gentleman on the screen as the voice of God speaking to us as God's children. See if it doesn't mean something a little different this time.