

## *God Is Like the Wind*

John 3:1-10

September 18, 2016

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Do you remember how three years ago we decorated this sanctuary as the Emerald City, complete with a yellow brick down the centre aisle? Many of you came to church dressed as characters from *The Wizard of Oz*. Some came as bathtubs caught up in the twister, others as Dorothy or a munchkin. One guy even came dressed in ruby-red slippers. After the service, we all shared an Aunt Em's potluck meal. We do that sort of fun thing here, at Lawrence Park Community Church.

Well, this morning, I want to return to *The Wizard of Oz*, though without costumes. In case that disappoints you, I do want to assure you that there is free food, after, at our "Welcome Sunday" BBQ.

In any case, in *The Wizard of Oz*, a young Kansan girl, Dorothy, and her house, are both transported by a tornado to the magical land of Oz. Dorothy wants to go back to Kansas, and so decides to ask the Wizard of Oz for help. On the way to see the wizard, Dorothy meets a lion without courage, a tin man who has no heart, and a straw man who has no brains. When they arrive, the Wizard promises them all they ask for, if only Dorothy can kill the Wicked Witch of the West. Dorothy does so, with a pail of water. So they all finally return to the Wizard's throne room to claim their prizes.

And it turns out that in spite of the fact that the Wizard seems to be, in turn, a great head, a ball of fire, or a terrible beast—it turns out that the Wizard actually cannot deliver what Dorothy and her friends hoped for.

And that is the point of today's meditation, too. God is not what many Christians through the ages have often made him out to be.

What I mean is this.

Many of us, certainly me, have been told since we were knee high to grasshoppers, that our God—if not a wizard, is sort of like an Emperor Pharaoh Caesar, only better, because our God really can do magic, too. This God rules over every detail of our lives, sometimes answers our prayers and sometimes not, and after we die, he—God is always a "he" in this tradition—he sits in judgement over our lives too, like Caesar, offering some of us a thumbs up and some a thumbs down.

In seminary, this God was described as—using words and concepts mostly derived from Greek philosophy—omniscient, immutable, impassible, infinite and omnipotent; God is omnipresent, of one substance, not mixed, uncreated, self-existent, self-sufficient, immaterial,

perfect, and—in spite of all of these descriptive words, God is also ineffable, which—ironically—means “unknowable.”

My professors also introduced me to Saint Augustine, who said, “Nothing, therefore, happens unless the Omnipotent wills it to happen.” John Calvin, added: “God foresees future events only by reason of the fact that he decreed they take place.” In other words, according to the giants of Western theology, it isn’t just that God permits terrible things to happen, but God actively insists that they happen.

Finally, this God sends his son to death on a cross. This is because, according to most Christian theology, God cannot forgive us our sins unless his (mighty!) divine honour, which we have offended; or perhaps his (mighty!) divine sense of justice, that we have transgressed—God cannot forgive sins until he is appeased by blood. Which, to me at least, makes this mighty God of Western theology seem very small and very petty, because all of us know how to forgive—say our children, or our friends—all of us know how to forgive without demanding an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth as forgiveness’s price.

Look, I admit my picture of the mighty God of Western Christendom is a bit of a caricature. Forgive me. But I wanted to mention it not only because it is out there, everywhere, it seems; but I mention these ideas about God because there is another picture of God in scripture that I find more helpful, more holy, more believable. Listen.

This God is—surprise—not a God of power and might, but a God of weakness, a God who comes in the still quiet voice, the God who, says Isaiah, hides; the God who is about as mighty as a first century fisherman, who is so tiny and inconsequential that she lives in our hearts, as insubstantial as a puff of wind from who knows where going who knows where.

And, with respect to all those theologians and philosophers who have important sounding Greek words to define God, remember this: just as you cannot nail down the wind to examine it, you cannot nail God down to examine her. The best we can do, actually, to describe God is to tell stories and use metaphors and similes. So Jesus said, “God is like the wind”—so also says Isaiah too—who then adds, you cannot measure this God on any scale. God is what no eye has seen, no ear has heard. God is weak, in the very best way possible, like an evening wind that refreshes after a hot day, caresses and rebirths us.

God is weak. This means that as much as we would like God to interfere, fix things, answer prayers to repair Aunt Minnie’s gall-bladder or fix the US election, God cannot. Such interference, like antimatter, would destroy our world and universe by compromising its very structure as a marvelous construction of cosmic law and matter, of human freedom and risk. The weakness of God is the tradeoff God accepts to give us life.

God is weak. Jesus explains. He said, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the father except through me. If you know me, you will know my father also.”

Amazing. This ancient Jewish man, a poor pedestrian carpenter, says, "If you know me, you will know God."

So if Jesus is mirror to God, this must mean that like Jesus, God does not raise her hand or lift a sword or use threats of hell to get her way;

If Jesus is our mirror to God, then we meet God especially in the embrace of the hungry and the refugees who cross our path; for as Jesus says he is to be found in the least and the last;

If Jesus is our mirror to God, then we must find God especially in the wisdom of parables that cannot be humanly explained, and in the humility of beatitudes that the strong in this world scoff at, for they are not at all impressed by divine weakness;

God is truly weak, by her own necessary design. But God is also, says a Jewish rabbi, like a little girl who hides during a game of hide and seek, and then laughs to give herself away. And when the wind blows, if you listen carefully, you will hear that laughter, which is actually a divine invitation for us to find our true selves, to become fully human, to square our own shoulders and live as God's own ambassadors of love and reconciliation.

God is weak, like the wind, so that we may be strong, like God.