

5 October 2017

*Rev Hideyoshi Kashiwagura*

[John 3:1–8]

## Living by the wind of the Holy Spirit

Before I start the message, I would like to briefly share some of my Christian testimony.

It was 20 years ago that I graduated from the University of Agriculture in Japan. I then travelled to California to spend a year in agricultural training, learning the ins and outs of dairy farming and grape cultivation.

My co-workers were mostly cheerful people, hailing from Mexico, Brazil, Switzerland, and Portugal. However, there were some who were irresponsible in the work the way they lived. Sometimes they'd not show up for work, and at other times they'd go home half-way through the work day without warning.

Worst of all, my roommate at the time, who was also my co-worker, often turned up to work drunk in the mornings. I found his attitude intolerable and once I even kicked him in frustration.

When I felt I could persevere no longer, I approached my boss at that time to complain.

My boss said to me, "It's not right to judge a person from one perspective only... everyone has good qualities."

Prior to speaking with my boss, I had been of the conception that I was a 'hard worker, and there was nothing that I could be criticised for.'

However, I realised this self-righteous perception of myself "That in my heart I'm right and good" was not actually what others may have thought about me.

It was at this point that I recognised the great prejudice and anger I carried within, that there was 'sin' in me that I hadn't known was there.

Because of this, I sought to find an objective justice, a righteousness that would rise above being Japanese, Mexican, Brazilian, Swiss, Portuguese or even American. I began searching for a righteousness based not on what I knew, but on an eternal, omnipresent truth.

My boss was a Christian and when my training ended, he gifted me a Japanese bible.

I took the opportunity to read the bible for the very first time. I grew to seriously think about God, and reflect further on my search for an objective truth.

Then just prior to leaving the US, my friend was involved in an accident. He too was a Christian.

Because of the accident he needed me to accompany him to the Japanese church he had been attending.

Again, taking the opportunity, I looked to quench my thirst for the truth. I asked the pastor every query I had about the bible. And through the bible I was able to understand deep in my heart that the creator of the bible was our God, and that Jesus died on the cross for our sins. In the bible, I found the truth I was looking for.

As a result, I was able to see my surroundings and circumstance in a new light and I chose to get baptised before returning to Japan.

Once I had returned to Japan, my new life as a Christian started ... I was overflowing with joy, and attended church every week. The people that attended the church with me were all very kind, and seemed almost angelic.

However, as church life went on, I began to feel critical of those that I once felt were so special. Sometimes I would see them argue in church and once again I'd find myself judging, criticising, and seeing these people in a biased light.

I grew to distrust myself. Here I was, knowing the truth and having repented of my sins, yet still struggling, still harbouring ill thoughts towards others.

Of course, the bible tells us of similar conflicts amongst the twelve disciples.

Despite the disciples witnessing the miracles of Jesus with their own eyes, and despite them hearing Jesus teaching directly, they could not resist arguing over who would be most important even before Jesus was hung on the cross. They weren't united as disciples of Jesus, but instead squabbled for power, choosing to prioritise their own personal interest above that of others.

Though at that time they were found lacking, after Jesus' resurrection, and after the Holy Spirit came upon them, they changed dramatically. They were not pursuing power any longer, nor were they afraid of persecution or death. In their desire to fulfil the gospel mission, they listened to the voice of God, and worked together in unity.

The disciples were transformed by the Holy Spirit. It is the same for us.

But apart from the Holy Spirit, our old self rules our thoughts. We assert ourselves, we invite conflict, we criticise, and we speak our sinful thoughts.

And in this way, there can be disastrous repercussions within the church, particularly during times of change. For example, issues such as construction of the church and maintenance, food and meals, and even the pastor selection process can often be a source of disagreement and unnecessary conflict.

We are simply incapable of remaining dead to our old selves without the help of the Holy Spirit.

In today's bible verse, John chapter 3 verse 1–8, the discussion between Jesus and Nicodemus is recorded in great detail for us.

In verse 3, Jesus declared, "I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again. And in verse 5, Jesus expanded on this and said, "I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit.

Jesus states that when people are 'born' they must be born of water and the Spirit.

There are several interpretations of what Jesus meant by 'water', but it most likely refers to 'purifying water' and would indicate the 'washing away of sins'. The 'Spirit' of course, refers to the 'Holy Spirit'.

Additionally, the word 'born' that Jesus uses, in the Greek, is the passive form, 'to be born'. Jesus is saying that unless one's sins are purified and you are born again of the Holy Spirit, it is impossible to see the kingdom of God, let alone enter it.

According to verse 1, this man Nicodemus was a Pharisee. The Pharisees were the strictest of Jewish sects and held stringently to the Jewish commandments.

The passage also states that he was a 'teacher of the Jews' and the NIV version says that he was 'a member of the Jewish ruling council'... a member of the Sanhedrin.

So, he adhered strictly to the commandments and knew them inside out. He was a teacher and a leader. In verse 2, it describes how 'He came to Jesus at night'.

In the Gospel of John, the word 'night' is often used with negative connotations. This pattern may suggest that Nicodemus wanted to avoid the people's eye by choosing to visit at night rather than approaching confidently during the day.

At night then, Nicodemus approaches Jesus and says, 'Rabbi, we know you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the miraculous signs you are doing if God were not with him'.

Nicodemus has come to the realisation that even though he keeps the commandments and studies the Jewish law, there is something missing in his fellowship with God. In Jesus, he sees something different, something powerful at work, and for that reason, he states that 'no one could perform the miraculous signs you are doing if God were not with him.'

He might have been thinking... 'although I know the law, I don't understand what to do to be as close to God as you.' These words of Nicodemus show that he is hungry and thirsty for a deeper relationship with God.

Jesus' response to Nicodemus is that 'no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit.'

But Nicodemus does not understand what being 'born of water and the Spirit' means.

Jesus went on further, saying to Nicodemus, "You should not be surprised at my saying, 'You must be born again.' The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit." (vs7-8)

Jesus states that "you should not be surprised at my saying 'You must be born again'". And he then likens the Spirit to the wind.

This 'wind' is the 'Holy Spirit' and Jesus teaches us 5 things about its nature.

### **1. The 'Wind of the Holy Spirit' blows where it pleases.**

'Wherever it pleases' means that the Spirit is not governed by the will of man, He is sovereign and works in perfect freedom. The 'wind of the Holy Spirit' is completely unhindered, acting freely in accordance with God's timing, place and choosing.

Paul, that persecutor of Christians, was chosen by the Holy Spirit, the 'wind' was pleased to blow into his life, and he was converted to Christianity. We must not presume to know, or limit, the movements of the wind, of the Holy Spirit.

### **2. The 'wind of the Holy Spirit' blows without rest.**

We may not be able to see the wind 'blowing' but we can know it... we can sense its power at work in and around us.

As the wind blows without rest, so the Spirit works tirelessly.

I ask the question, how strongly do you feel the Spirit's influence? Have you sensed that the wind of the Holy Spirit is working within each one of us with great power and force?

### **3. The 'wind of the Holy Spirit' can be heard.**

When it is time for the church to change and adapt, an unfamiliar 'sound' can be heard – this is the stirring of new activity and witness. Instead of fearing this unfamiliar 'sound' and attempting to extinguish it, we must learn to faithfully discern the sound of the 'wind' and be led by it.

How carefully are we listening for the voice of the Holy Spirit in our midst?

### **4. We cannot tell where 'the wind of the Holy Spirit' comes from.**

World Missions began in Jerusalem and spread throughout Judea and Samaria. But who can say exactly how the gospel has reached us in this day and age.

On October 31, it was 500 years to the day that Martin Luthor posted his **Ninety-Five Theses to the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg**. This too happened because the Holy Spirit came to fulfil the will of God and do His work.

We rarely understand how it is that newcomers are guided to the church but we must be prepared to accept the moving of the Holy Spirit and all that He brings no matter which direction He blows from. If we are not prepared, we may miss the precious opportunities that the Holy Spirit provides to us.

#### **5. We cannot tell where 'the wind of the Holy Spirit' is going.**

Human plans and calculations are unreliable. And in pursuing our predetermined goals, we risk inhibiting the will of the Holy Spirit. Instead we need to submit to His leading. And in order to do that, we must first let the 'wind' of the Holy Spirit blow fully through our lives.

Nicodemus was well versed in the knowledge of the law and how to act in accordance with it. However, that way of life has limits and does not satisfy. What is most important, is fellowship with the living God, and ultimately walking in faith – that is to say, being 'born again' everyday, by the Holy Spirit.

Nicodemus was solely focused on his own works 'what should I do?' he could not understand the things of the Spirit ... the Wind.

Like the wind, the Holy Spirit has a discernable voice and moves as He pleases, coming and going where we cannot know. He leads us to new places. We must learn to sense His presence with both our mind and heart, and be born again everyday so that we may one day enter the kingdom of God.

Otherwise, our old selves might consume us once again, or perhaps like Nicodemus, we will feel lost to the demands of the law, forever wondering what works will save us.

I eagerly await the awesome opportunities God has planned for Canterbury Presbyterian church in the future. God bless you!!

Amen