The great American movie “Forrest Gump” opens with a feather floating in the sky. Gently aloft it drifts and dances above the trees, it alights on one man’s shoulder, it lifts and wafts, and finally falls at Forrest’s feet. I think the image is meant to suggest the random flight of life – the wind blows us here and there, near and far. And like a box of chocolates you never know what you’re going to get.

It blows Forrest from Vietnam to a bayou shrimp boat, from football to ping pong, from running across the country to running home to his mother, from loving Jenny to befriend Lieutenant Dan. And at the end of the movie, as Forrest watches his son’s school bus drive away, the feather at his feet floats away – caught up in a flight of fancy that you can’t predict, control, or contain.


For some the Holy Spirit is an active force blowing with power, promise, and purpose. It leads to jobs, houses, political certainty, parking spots, and the planting of new churches. For some the Spirit is an internal voice or a feeling that calms anxiety and stills the troubled breast. Others identify the Holy Spirit as that which flames revivals and causes them quake-shake-and-rattle-snake. For others the Holy Spirit is the mysterious third party of the Trinity from which they keep their distance….

How do you think of the Spirit of God? Is it like a wind that you can’t predict, control, or contain? Even in a pandemic is it an elusive wind – the flight of fancy of God?

How do you think about the Spirit of God?

*Now. There is some stretch here – but I think it’s faithful to the text and therefore helpful for how we understand the Spirit of God. Stay with me...*

In writing to the church in Rome Paul is writing from a Jewish grounding into a Greek culture. And, in doing so he casts the gospel between the theology of the Hebrews and the philosophy of the Greeks.
With crass broad strokes…

Greek philosophy saw the physical world, the body, as corrupted and transitory; and the realm of spirit/idea as pure and eternal. The Hebrews were earthy. They saw the physical world as good and profitable; and *ruach*, the very breath of God, was active in creation. This world and the promise of a land was a blessing of God. *Shalom* wasn’t ethereal it was earthy. Jews and Greeks offered two distinct ways of understanding reality.

Into that mix Paul writes at the beginning of chapter 8 that there is no condemnation, and at the end of chapter 8 that there is no separation - for those who are in Christ. You are neither condemned nor separated from God because you reside in Christ and Christ resides in you. You are neither condemned nor separated because you reside in the Spirit and the Spirit resides in you. The indwelling of Christ and the indwelling of Spirit are distinguishable, but inseparable. With one you get the other.

And with that bold-good-news Paul turns the constructions of Greek philosophy and in some sense Hebrew theology on their collective heads. The spiritual isn’t an elusive realm that is beyond our grasp – but we are in the Spirit and the Spirit is in us. The earthy isn’t just a corruptible prison, but it is the very place in which the Spirit dwells.

In language that is descriptive not hortatory, Paul writes that the Spirit is in us. It’s not just a sporadic impulse or a willy-nilly wind, but whether we’re aware of it or not, the Spirit is in our bodies.

And, that’s crazy talk!

Funny language that makes me feel all itchy and scratchy. But, it’s not some manner of feel-good-new-age-y-spirituality where we are all part of the one big God. Rather, this is the recognition that into the dry brittle bones of Ezekiel, or the self-described wretch of Paul, or the dead body of Lazarus, or into my frail body and conflicted soul God breathes life and take up residence. God in our bodies.

Listen to Karl Barth on this:

*Men (and women) achieve this status neither by the process of logical thought, nor by aesthetic intuition, not by moral act of will, nor by means of some religious experience. The status is theirs already by the faithfulness of God displayed in the mission of His Son.*
It seems we gave up gathering together for Lent, but our preaching path through Lent has primarily been in Romans and we’ve used this language and imagery….

We’re caught up in swirling caldron of sin and death. But, God demonstrates his love for us in that while we were still powerless, covered in our own mess, Christ entered into that caldron even unto death – that we might live. And this morning, the seal of that is the Spirit of God in us.

The Spirit is something other than just the wind and whim of God. It has set up shop in your mortal body. A wholly-other-breath is in you. A spark of the Divine dwells in you.

Twenty-some years ago I served as a teacher and chaplain at Chicago Christian High School. One spring afternoon in a senior Bible class a young man was slouched in his seat resting his head in hands. I thought he was dreaming of cars and girls and summer, when suddenly his head snapped up, his face scrunched up, and he piped up,

*We believe what?*

Quizzical bewilderment clouded his face as twelve years of Christian schooling whipped past. He tried to dredge up countless hours of Bible class. He replayed the sermons he could recall, revisited retreats, and rifled through eighteen years of Reformed files. How could this be? How could he have missed this? Was this true?

*We believe what?*

And I responded,

*_We believe in the resurrection of dead. Every time we say the Apostles Creed – we are confessing our confidence in a physical resurrection._*

No longer slouched he was dumfounded.

He wasn’t a seeker; he was an insider.
He wasn’t a dolt or a dullard; he was a solid middle-of-the-roader.
He’d been in the shade of the faith all his life, and yet somehow this high point of the creed had been lost in the shadows.

My guess is, if pressed, he would own up to believing in some mystical moment when we will all be whisked away to eternal bliss. My hunch is he believes in a heaven where our souls are suspended between clouds, warm lights, and harp music. He knows that Jesus rose from the dead, but he missed the part of about us.

What if he knew that the Spirit of God had set up shop in his soul? What if he knew that the breath of God was breathed into his body? What if he knew that the Spirit of God wouldn’t leave him, slip this shell, and flit off somewhere else?
Dear friends, can we understand the indwelling of the Spirit of God as the very guarantee, the seal, that we will – somehow – be resurrected, body and Spirit together?

Again, in the words of Barth:

_The indwelling of the Spirit in us, the self-inaugurated motion of the Spirit towards us, is necessary for the establishing of our relation to God. There is no other means of union, and this one is sufficient.... Resurrection of the body.... is the most outrageous, but most indispensable, interpretation of what the Spirit means for our life._

On a global scale it took 67 days to go from the first COVID-19 case to 100,000 cases. It took 11 days to 200,000. It took 4 days to 300,000. It took 3 days to surpass 400,000. You get idea. At this writing we’ve blown past 500,000. The math and science of this virus relentlessly push forward; there is little that is whimsical or random like a feather on the wind that you can’t predict, control, or contain. And, it is hard to know how this will be curtailed or cured or come to an end, but there is a certain clarity to its continued march in these next weeks and months.

But! But, may that reality be met by the reality that the Spirit of God dwells in our bodies. May we recognize and respect that reality in every other body, in every other life. May we find in that Spirit courage and confidence for the living of these days. May it help us build resilience and nurture hope. And may we know a measure of comfort and a deep trust that even in death we will be resurrected. For that is sealed by the Holy Spirit.

Thanks be to God.
Amen.