

24 May 2015, Pentecost

The Story of the Wind

I am a pastor and scholar, but before that I was a storyteller. From my earliest days, I have told and retold ancient stories – legends and myths and traditional tales – because I have always found deeper truth in those stories than I have found in science or philosophy or even theology. Now do not mistake me. I am not opposed to science or philosophy or theology. They are very nice, too. But for today – and for the next few weeks – I want to be simply a storyteller.

But before I can start today's story, I have to sound like a scholar and trot out a Hebrew word. You see, our language – English – sometimes has too many words. When we English-speakers say the words *wind*, *breath*, and *spirit*, because they are different words, we think that we are talking about different things. Hebrew knows better, though, and has only one word for all three. The word is *ruah*. Ruah is wind and breath and spirit. And there is one more thing you must know: Ruah is feminine. Today, on Pentecost, I want to tell you her story.

Ruah has been from the beginning, and there has never been a time when Ruah was not. She has been for as long as the Father has been – and so long as we're avoiding English, let's call the Father something else, too. Let us say, Matua, which means Father in the Maori language, but also more than Father. Matua and Ruah have been together, dancing and loving, from before time, together but distinct. Where Matua imagined, Ruah moved, and so there came a day before time when Ruah brooded over the face of empty chaos, yearning for others with which to dance and love. Feeling her yearning, Matua spoke and thus began all that is. Matua spoke and there was light, and then there was space, and then there was matter, and then there was life. There were fish and birds and green plants bearing seed and creatures that crawl and run, until at last Matua imagined a new sort of creature, one that would be like Matua and Ruah, also able to love and dance and imagine new worlds. This was a great imagining, and as always, when Matua imagined greatly, he called upon Ruah to help make it so. Matua shaped a man from dust and Ruah blew through that dust, and Ruah herself entered the new creature, a living thing of dust called Adham – people – so that Adham had himself a Ruah, a wisp of the same Ruah that had been from the beginning.

Now that story is told at the very beginning of our book, the Holy Bible, and there is much more written there. But as the story proceeds, Ruah seems to hide in the background. The story as it unfolds tells mostly of Matua and Adham, and a very messy story it is. You see, having been made like Matua and Ruah, Adham was able to imagine freely, but that meant that Adham could imagine glory or corruption, could imagine love or isolation. Far too often, Adham imagined corruption and isolation. Next week, as I tell the story of Matua, I will talk about all the things that he tried as he sought to bring Adham back to the dance of love, but for now it is enough to know that Adham paid no attention to Matua. Adham continued to imagine only corruption and isolation.

Here at last is where Ruah comes back into the story. Realizing that Adham would not return to love and dance with them unless someone helped, Ruah began to visit the earth and to breathe with particular power on certain men and woman, those few who dared to breathe more deeply than others, giving them greater imagination, so that they could see farther and call others back to their creator. In the years that followed, those who breathed thus deeply and called Adham back to Matua, came to be known as prophets.

I must tell you about one of these prophets, a strange man named Ezekiel. In his time, the people that Matua had chosen as his blessing to the world lived in exile, in slavery. Ezekiel had been raised to be a priest of Matua, but when Ruah blew over him he became a prophet. Ezekiel drew in her power so deeply that he became hers utterly. When Ruah breathed within him, he came alive, and when she was still, he became dumb and empty. He was like a pipe that made strange and beautiful music, but only when his Mistress played, only when Ruah blew through him. Ezekiel did not breathe just with his own ruah but with the Ruah that had been from before time, and he saw visions of things beyond naming so that he spoke of them only in halting, stammering words. In one such vision, Ezekiel walked with Ruah, hand in hand, to a place corrupted by war, and there they stepped over the dry bones of the dead. "Ezekiel," whispered Ruah, "can these dry bones live?" and Ezekiel said, "Only you know, my breath." And Ruah smiled on her prophet and blew over the field. As on the first day when Matua shaped Adham from clay, Ruah enlivened the dust, knit together what was scattered, restored the corrupted. The dead rose from the ground, living creatures again, filled with wind and breath and spirit – Ruah.

But even the prophets were not enough: Adham continued to imagine only corruption and isolation. Matua and Ruah could not leave them in their darkness. They had created them out of love and for the sake of love, and so they sent the Son – a Son who had been with the two of them before time and who had known their dance and their love. In two weeks, and then all summer long, I shall tell the story of the Son, but I must tell a part of that story now, how the Son set about restoring the corrupt isolation of Adham. Here is how it happened: Ruah entered into a young woman named Miriam, who bore the Son into the world. When the Son became a man, Ruah descended on him, as a dove might settle on a man's shoulders, and blessed him and sent him out, a man whose breath was not his own but was Breath itself. Adham, blinded by his own corruption and isolation, resisted the Son, even killed him, but dry bones mean nothing to Ruah. On the third day after they killed him, Ruah blew over the Son again, and he rose from death.

Before he died and rose, though, the Eternal Son had gathered together friends he had made on earth and made to them a promise. He said, "I will not stay with you forever, but when I go I will send one to be with you, one who will never leave. I will send her who breathes in me, that she may breathe in you. I will send my mother and sister, Ruah, who will blow to the farthest corners of earth, who will breathe through every spirit. And so it came about. On a day which the people of that land called Pentecost – it doesn't matter why – Ruah came down and breathed fire. No longer would she blow only through a chosen few, the prophets. Now she would breathe life throughout all Adham. From that day, the course of corruption and isolation was changed forever. A new day has begun.

This is the story of the wind.

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In the Seminole Nation, there is a tribe called the Muskogee. They too know the story of the wind, because Ruah blows where she wills, but the Muskogee tell it differently. Here is their story. In the beginning, the Father Spirit created all the earth and all the people, but the earth was dark and all its surface was covered with a thick mist. The people whom the Father Spirit had made were lost in the mist, for they could not see far enough to find others to love. So, the people cried out to the Father Spirit, cried out with the despair of their loneliness, and the Father Spirit said, "I will send a new people to the earth, I will send the Wind People, and they will blow away the mist so that people can see others, can see that they are not alone. The Wind People will bring them together," and that is what the Father Spirit did.

That mist is not yet gone, not entirely. Still there are those who do not see others, and so cannot love. But my brothers and sisters, we over whom Ruah has blown, we who have felt her fire, we can restore them. Breathe today in love. Dissipate the mist. We are the Wind People.