

“Once upon a time...” This phrase used to excite me to no end, because it meant that a story was beginning. For my children, the equivalent is probably, “A long time ago in a galaxy far, far away...” I love stories. We as humans love stories. Whether it is a love story, a battle story, fiction or non-fiction, history or fantasy or horror, we all love stories. They help us understand the world, give us hope, and entertain us all at the same time.

“In the beginning...” This wonderful biblical phrase (from which the title of the first book, Genesis, comes) now excites similar feelings in me. Whether in John’s Gospel or Genesis, this phrase means there is a story coming, and not just any story: God’s Story. And that story begins with creation. But first, a word from the Holy Spirit.

As we approach Pentecost this weekend, we are going to look at some interesting biblical passages having to do with the Holy Spirit, and the first is, well, the First. Or second, in this case.

*“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.”*

While we always run on to, “Let there be light,” this week, just sit with these two verses. Close your eyes, (oops, now you can’t read anymore. Maybe do that later) and try to picture this scene. Try to picture... nothing. No light, no ground, nothing to touch, no air or sky or anything. Just water. All was water. I picture a sensory-deprivation tank, except that’s all there is anywhere. The only things that exist only in God: the Father is there, the Son is there, and the Holy Spirit is there. And what’s more, God through His Holy Spirit, is “hovering” over these waters, which are everywhere. So we get a sense of multi-dimensionality.

The Greek word for Spirit is *pneuma*, which is also translated as “wind” and “breath”. So not only is God’s Holy Spirit “hovering” over the waters, but a Wind blows over the waters, and God’s breath breathes on the waters. What an evocative image for us! Have you ever done that on a clear pool or puddle? Perfectly smooth, so you blow gently on it and it ripples, small nuances on the water marking places where you had an effect. What were these ripples of God’s Breath, His *pneuma*, on the waters of nothing, or everything, or both?

It amazes me that this breath, this wind, this Spirit shows up again a few verses later...

*“Then the LORD God formed a man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being.”*

It’s the same word! The *pneuma* that hovered over the waters, that rippled the nothingness before creation, entered us and gave us life. Is this one of the ripples? Are we the nuances on the water of everything where God has His effect? We are spiritual beings with spirits of our own, yet filled with the Holy Spirit when we follow Jesus Christ, God in the flesh. We are vessels of God’s breath, His *pneuma*.

From doves to fire, from light to thunder, God’s Spirit takes many forms, and I wonder if one of those is a ripple on the waters of everything. You are a spiritual being, able to be filled with the Holy Spirit if you’ll let Him fill you. And empower you. And teach you. And yes, even use you.

Questions to ponder:

Have you received the gift of the Holy Spirit? How do you know?

What is your favorite image of the Holy Spirit, either in scripture or in your own ponderings?