My brothers and sisters in Christ, let us pray. Lord of our Hearts, Minds, Souls, and Spirits, may the words of my mouth and the meditation of all of our hearts always be acceptable in Your sight, our strength and our Redeemer, Amen.

When we think of wind, what images come to mind? Is wind a good thing or a bad thing in our experience? (take all answers). Yes, well, I guess it does depend on the circumstances. Do we know where we encounter the wind in our passage today, or in the Bible in general?

We encounter that from the first passages, where the Spirit of the Lord moved across the deep. The Hebrew word for wind is ruach (roo-akh). Say it with me. OK. The Hebrew word for Spirit is also ruach. And another meaning for ruach is also “breath”.

I think we can all agree that if we think about where we encounter the words wind, Spirit, and breath in the Bible, we have a whole lot of ruach going on. And we also have a study in contrasts in our texts, don’t we? In both texts we have a central figure: in Numbers, it’s Moses, and in the Gospel of Mark, it’s Jesus.

Both of them bear heavy responsibilities, don’t they? Moses for sure, because everyone knows his relationship to God and they rely on him for being sure that God is pleased—after all, everyone saw Moses bring down the 10 commandments, and so they knew that he had this special relationship with God that they did not. Jesus, on the other hand, is starting small. Nobody really knows his special relationship with God, and even the disciples are just coming to figure that out. But there’s a difference between leading 12 and leading 40,000 isn’t there?

Moses says it’s all too much, that he can’t do it anymore. And God says, “OK, I get that. I can spread the Spirit around a little bit more than just on you”. Phew. OK. But wait. He takes some ruach away from Moses.

What’s going on? Is there a finite portion of ruach in the world? What’s happening here is the glory of what happens when the people of God gather in community. In the beginning of our Old Testament lesson we’re led to think that the distribution of the Spirit meant the distribution of authority and responsibility. But as it ends up, it really means ruach means prophecy.

And Moses, after all, is human. He’s going to die at some point. But who will come after him? How do we test that ruach in the new person or people as the folks who can mediate between God and the people of God?

Now, our Pentecostal brothers and sisters use this text often to prove that they can be filled with ruach at any moment for any reason. But for my two cents, I think that when God spreads Spirit to others, God’s making the decision that yes, it’s probably too much for one person to have that special relationship and to always, and only, be on call all the time. And it’s the first time we start to see the Spirit break out, because even with the 70 who are gathered, there’s these other 2 across camp who get the Spirit also. And Joshua and Aaron are worried about false prophets, remember. How can these new persons be trusted with ruach?

It brings to us a fundamental question. We’ve always done things a certain way, whether it’s rummage sales, budgets, or decorating the church for certain seasons. When something new happens, it upsets the old tradition. I’m not saying that’s good or bad; but there is a change.

In our new testament text, Jesus is just a little better equipped to hold the awesome power of God than Moses, mostly because we know he’s God. But the disciples don’t. Just like Joshua, they have been watching Jesus, and Jesus is very careful about telling folks about the miracles and the disciples are really wary to do anything without Jesus’ knowledge. But even Jesus welcomes the distribution of the Spirit to others outside of those who had previously been the insiders. Jesus makes it more clear than Moses about the welcome and relief of the burden, doesn’t he? Not only does he welcome change and ruach where it blows, but he doesn’t even ask details like the names or locations of where the ruach is. God just says that anyone who does things that work for all is good, and that’s pretty cool.

And the disciples are maybe a little bit stunned. Wouldn’t you be? Here they have been following all the instructions and listening intently and someone comes along and heals “in the name of Jesus” and they get full credit? Hey, whoa, wait up. How do we know they can be trusted? We might even say in modern times that question dates back to Moses. Literally.

We see that human behavior doesn’t change. We all like to feel special and particularly if we have something that others don’t have: a special training, talent, or skill. We like to show it off, but aren’t always keen to tell folks the secret, right? Magicians never tell. But the Kingdom of God isn’t magic. And ruach is real.

I’ll leave you with these final thoughts.

 God is in charge of where the Spirit blows, not us. It’s not up to us to manage the breath, the wind, the Spirit of the Lord. Only God can do that.

What we can do is let go of our fuddy-duddiness when we are confronted with changing things as our future unfolds. This pandemic will be a marker in time for us individually, our church and for every faith community, defining who we were then and who we will be now. And the question we must face is will we embrace the Spirit’s opportunities for us, or will we rely on our old understandings of how we understand ourselves? Is it faithful when we can’t step out into a new understanding of faith? What is ruach to us? Something that is a hurricane wind, that needs to be buttressed against, or something that changes the landscape more gradually, like a force of nature carves out new features of our faith from the rocks and fossils of the long ago past?

Here at CCCG, we have buildings. We have money. But do we have a way to spread God’s gracious spirit around? Or do we rely on seeing God only in those things which we know, afraid to step out into our post-pandemic world? Ruach is here. It’s should be settling for our souls.

Or maybe it’s a bit unsettling. Jesus saw that when he said not to get in the way of the little ones, the new persons and ideas who didn’t know any better. He saw change and unsettledness as purposeful, particularly the new and eager ones. Because they, too, knew God’s purpose, just through a different lens. Where’s our God today, our ruach? Shaken or stirred? I hope it’s either or both. As long as it’s not still.

We had a good week during the 300th. We showed how we could be a house of learning and community. So let’s go forth and do both those things, letting folks know they can come here for coffee and to be changed. Maybe that’s the ruach we seek. Thanks be to God, Amen.