

Reflection
The Rev. Claudia Merritt
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St. Stephen's Episcopal Church
Richmond, VA

When our two oldest boys were little, six and four, they had an interesting conversation while sitting outside on the front stoop. They may have been gazing at the huge maple tree that dominated our front yard. Or maybe they were just having a brotherly chat waiting to be called inside.

I was in the kitchen making dinner, but the front door was open so they could be overheard. It was late enough in the day that the sky was slowly moving into dusk, and the wind was beginning to pick up; it was breezy. This was my children's conversation, and I have to say it amazed me.

The four year old said to his big brother, "You know, Andrew, I don't think there's a God."

His older brother answered, "Why not, Stephen?"

"Well," the younger one replied, "You can't see God; you can't hear God; you can't even touch God. There's no God."

Four-year-olds are so concrete!

Andrew said to him, “Stephen, There is a God. Just because you can’t see God doesn’t mean he isn’t there. You can’t *see* the wind, but it’s still there. Right?”

Stephen responded, “Yeah, but that’s the wind. I still don’t think there’s a God. Besides I know when the wind blows. I can feel it and the leaves move. Andrew, where does the wind come from anyway? And where does it go when it’s done blowing?”

Looking back I am aware of how early our identity is formed. The child who wanted empirical evidence grew to be a scientist while his older brother majored in philosophy.

Clearly this story has stuck with me not just because I was amazed that small children had such deep thoughts, but because it invites the question, how *do* we know God is present? Where *does* the wind come from and where *does* it go? I agree with my son that it can be hard to discern God’s presence. We

human beings want tangible signs. Mystery and ambiguity stretch us, especially when our need for God is strongest.

We find it easy to be aware of God when we are wrapped in awe and wonder, or overtaken by beauty. The grandeur of mountains, the vibrant colors of fall, the rapture of gorgeous music, the miracle of a newly born baby can all put us in touch with the holy. We know deep inside that God is present. But it's much harder when we are lonely, scared, or our world is falling apart. Yet even then, the wind blows. It blows where it chooses, and we don't know where it comes from or where it goes.

The wind is the breath of God. I wish I could have told that to my child. It blows where it will. In times of joy and wonder, it can feel brisk and strong and energizing. Then, we have no trouble recognizing God's breath and sometimes don't even wonder about it. We take it for granted.

But we don't always live our lives there. Sometimes life is hard, as when are waiting for the doctor's office to call with test results, or our families or marriages are falling apart, or we feel guilt-ridden or hopeless, when our life feels that it is all darkness. That's when we ask the question: is there a God? And where does the breath of God come from and where does go? Where is

it right now? It is at times like these that we do well to still ourselves, quiet our racing minds. Then, if we are we are very still, we are able to feel God's breath not as a strong wind capable of bending saplings, but as a barely discernable movement of air caressing our face. Even in dark uncertain times, God keeps breathing, surrounding us, touching us.

The wind blows, as it will, whenever God exhales. It is completely out of our control. How wonderful! Thank goodness! God has been breathing since the universe first came into being, and God never stops breathing. We are enveloped in the exhalations, whether we believe it or not. The wind is never as far away as we might sometimes think.

Yes, Stephen, there is a God, even if you don't see him, or hear him, or feel him. It's the wind blowing.