

MOVIE CLIP <<*The Wizard of Oz* 1:09:40—1:12:31: *The four companions tremble with fear in the presence of the Wizard.*>>

Is that your picture of God? Like the Great and Powerful Oz?

A lot of people think of God that way.

To be fair, there are places in scripture where God is described that way. In Exodus God came down upon the mountain in fire and smoke and earthquake to give the Law to the Israelites. God the great and powerful. God the awesome and terrible.

If that's your picture of God, then your place in the relationship is pretty clear: you don't count for much. In the words of the Wizard you're just a "clinking clanking clattering collection of collagenous junk" or a "billowing bail of bovine fodder." That's a scary picture. Maybe the Cowardly Lion's reaction is correct--run away from such a God as fast as you can.

And if you want anything from such a God, then you'd better do something to bribe or appease or placate such a powerful being. In the words of the Wizard, "First you must prove yourselves worthy by performing a very small task... Bring me her broomstick and I'll grant your requests."

That's a common picture of God. And, yes, God's glory, and power, and awesomeness, and holiness are certainly aspects of his nature. But there's far more to God than that.

On the day of Pentecost, the Jewish people celebrate the God of fire and smoke and earthquake who gave them the law at Mt. Sinai. But Christians celebrate Pentecost in another way. We celebrate different aspects of God's nature. In fact, our 3 lessons from scripture today show us different aspects of God's nature and God's work through the person of the Holy Spirit.

So today, I want see what we can know about the nature of God the Holy Spirit. And I want to see if *The Wizard of Oz* can help us out.

<<*The Wizard of Oz* 18:35—19:49: *Dorothy is caught up in the twister and finds herself in a colorful new land.*>>

In the 2nd chapter of Acts, the disciples are preparing to celebrate Pentecost, probably in the old way, giving glory to the God of wind and flame and thunder who gave the Law to Moses. But Luke tells us that as they were together, "there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind." He doesn't say it was wind. But it was like wind. "And divided tongues as of fire appeared among them." Again, he doesn't say it was fire. He says it was like fire.

But that manifestation of the Holy Spirit in something like wind and fire does the same thing to the apostles that the tornado did to Dorothy. In Dorothy's vision it is the wind that shakes her up, and picks her up, and takes her to a new land. And that new land is a land that is very different from Kansas. It is a land of vibrant colors. Also a land of singing munchkins and

flying monkeys. And it is a land with powerful spiritual forces who are threatening and dangerous. This new land holds both promise and peril.

On the day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit shakes up the apostles. It takes them out of their comfort zone, out of the house they had been hiding in, and out into the streets. And there, in public, they are undoubtedly out of their comfort zones. And yet, they begin to proclaim to all who would listen, the good news of Jesus Christ. Peter, who 54 days before had denied even knowing Jesus is now preaching about Jesus fearlessly. He is willing to stand up, in the face of powerful and dangerous opposition. He is willing to do what the Holy Spirit has empowered him to do.

That is also what God the Holy Spirit does to us. The Spirit at times comes to shake us up. To move us to a new place. To pull us out of our comfort zones. To challenge and stretch us. To equip us for the work of ministry.

That's all part of the nature of God the Holy Spirit. But there's more.

<<The Wizard of Oz 46:02—47:32: The Tin Man and Scarecrow are alongside Dorothy as she faces the wicked witch.>>

In our Gospel lesson from John, Jesus tells his disciples about the coming of the Holy Spirit. Only Jesus has a special word.

Jesus calls the Spirit, "The Advocate." In Greek, the *parakletos*, the Paraclete, the Counselor, the Intercessor, the Helper. In the legal system, this was a sort of defense attorney and best man rolled into one. This was the person who stood beside you to support you and intervene on your behalf.

In this scene Dorothy has two Advocates, and will soon gain a third. The Scarecrow, the Tin Man, and the Lion come alongside her. They stand beside her in the face of the Wicked Witch. They walk the path beside her on the journey. She has done nothing to earn their friendship or their help. It is simply a gift. In Christian terms, it is grace.

This grace, this gift, is not magic. Dorothy has these advocates who are with her. But she still has to go through the difficulties of her journey. These companions don't automatically insure that Dorothy will never suffer. But they do promise to be with her.

In the same way, Jesus tells us, that's what God the Holy Spirit does for us. He comes along side. To help. To aid. To defend. To travel with us in the midst of difficulty. Not to exempt us from suffering. But to be with us through it all.

The Spirit doesn't just call us out of our comfort zones, give us a job to do, and then leave us alone. The Spirit calls us, and equips us, and then promises to walk with us. He is our close companion on the road.

That's all part of the Spirit's work. But there's still more.

<<*The Wizard of Oz* 1:36:15—1:37:28: *The good witch tells Dorothy that the ruby slippers have power to get her home.*>>

In the 8th chapter of Romans, Paul speaks of the intimate aspects of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is not just outside of us prodding us or walking beside us. God also gives us the Holy Spirit to dwell within us, to be part of us.

What's more, Paul tells us, when you get to the end of your rope, the Spirit is still there. And when you can't even find the words to pray, when all you can say to God is, "Uggh," the Spirit is there.

Paul says, "The Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words."

In other words, even when we don't know what to say, even when we don't know what to ask for, the Spirit is there to pray for us. The Spirit is there in our hearts to sigh and groan with us, and to carry those deep prayers to the Father's throne.

Dorothy is certainly at the end of her rope. She thought the Wizard was the only one who could help her. Even when she found out he was only a human being, she was still going to hitch a ride with him in his balloon. And when the balloon left without her, she thought she was out of options. She doesn't know what to do, and she can't even imagine what to ask for. It is then that Glenda appears and tells her she has had the solution all along. Those ruby slippers, that gift that had been given to her, had all the power she needed to get home.

And all Dorothy can say is, "That's too wonderful to be true."

The Holy Spirit is wonderful. The Spirit acts outside of us, to challenge and stretch us. The Spirit acts alongside of us, to support and walk with us. And the Spirit acts inside of us, when we don't even know what to ask for. What could be more wonderful than that?

Dorothy ends up back in Kansas. She's back where she started from. But she's there in a new way. The tornado carried her to a new place. New companions helped her along the way. She received the powerful gift that helped her go back home. And she returns home with deeper insight and new appreciation.

The Holy Spirit comes to us. And he comes to us, even in Lubbock, Texas, to equip us to do God's work in Lubbock, Texas.

May he be our challenger, our companion, our advocate, and our guide.

Come Holy Spirit. Come.