

"Go Fly a Kite"
John 6:25-35

The health care debate is getting intense these days. This past week an unnamed congressman was told by another member of Congress to "Go fly a kite."

We often think of that as a negative comment; like "Buzz Off" or "Go Jump in the Lake." But there is another meaning to that phrase. I'll bet that most of you over the age of 40 have seen the movie "Mary Poppins." Am I right? How many of you have never seen that Disney classic? . . . Wow. [React to how few, or how many.]

Those of you who have seen this movie know that it's a story about a magical nanny who saves some poor little rich kids from their father's inattention. Remember the ending? The father re-establishes his relationship with his kids by taking them kite flying. The song the re-born family joyously sings together is "Let's Go Fly A Kite." [If you can play it here, fantastic. Or better yet, get your choir to sing it.]

Let's go fly a kite
Up to the highest heights
Let's go fly a kite, and send it soaring.
Up in the atmosphere,
Up where the air is clear,
Let's all go . . . fly a kite.

Flying high. Flying free. Flying solo. Flying together. Flying was the great dream that drove the Apollo 11 astronauts to land on the moon 40 years ago last month (20 July 1969).

Our Scripture lesson for this morning finds Jesus trying to teach people the difference between earthly bread and heavenly bread, between the visible and the invisible. It's a distinction that Paul captured in his second letter to the church at Corinth: "So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal" (2 Corinthians 4:18). This morning, I want us to explore what Jesus is driving home to the crowd by this image of being born up into the heavens by the power of the invisible, which we call flying, and in particular kite-flying.

Flying drove the imaginations of all sorts of adventurers as the twentieth century dawned. Once the Wright brothers finally got aloft, partly as a result of their literal kite-flying, there was no keeping fliers down. Within two decades there were barn-stormers, wing-walkers, crop-dusters. When World War I erupted, there were dive-bombers and dog-fighters.

Flying became the mark of the new modern era. But like everything else "modern" it came with lots of strings attached. A pilot had to get certified and licensed. There were engineering concerns. Aerodynamic logistics. Gas. Oil. Spark plugs. Electrical systems. Hydraulics. Weather issues. Visibility requirements. As air travel grew in comfort, speed, altitude, and complexity, the technology that kept flyers tethered to "ground control" became more and more of an intricately tangled web.

The simple kite on the end of a single string might not get our bodies aloft, but it remains the simplest, most basic form of free-flying human beings can experience. Is it possible to fly a kite without your soul soaring?

All you need to fly a kite is a kid (or a kid's spirit), a string, tissue paper, and a couple of sticks. And, of course, wind. As long as the kite has wind to buoy it up, as long as the powers of the invisible are there to keep it in the air, and a sturdy string, tethering it to the ground, the kite can fly.

But there is a paradox at the heart of kite-flying. In order to stay aloft, you have to be grounded. And the higher you soar, the more tethered you need to be. Holding tight to the tethering string is crucial—for that is what keeps the tension on the line, and enables the invisible winds to lift and play with the kite. A kite can do all sorts of spectacular things sail, dip, soar, swoop and re-group as long as the string stays taut and tough.

Let go of the string and what happens? The kite might make a few impressive free-for-all swoops and spins. But before long the kite will crash. Without guidance it's a goner.

Total freedom is another word for crash-and-burn.

A free-for-all leads to a free-fall.

It takes the freedom of the air, coupled with the anchoring of the string, to give a simple kite simple flight.

In today's gospel text the crowd Jesus fed with a few loaves and fishes track him down. It is obvious to Jesus that this crush of people has been motivated by their stomachs, not their hearts. Since the crowd's quest is for bread, Jesus offers them the recipe they need for "enduring" food. They need a meal that will lead to and last through "eternal life." It is a simple, one-step recipe: "Believe in Him whom He has sent." If the people can but put their faith in Jesus they will receive an unending supply of the "bread of heaven."

Jesus declares himself to be this "bread of life." To receive genuine life, abundant life, to gain eternal life, all we must do is to come to Christ with faith and trust. (the Spirit calls, gathers us. We don't come to Christ, He comes to us in Baptism, in Word, the Gospel.) Once grounded in the love of God through Jesus the Christ, we are free from the grueling grind and daily drive for "bread."

Few of us are multi-millionaires. When we read about some lucky lottery winner scoring a huge jackpot, its enough to send us dreaming of "what if." Or at least it does me. What if I would never have to worry about money again? What if I were completely out of debt? What if I could buy anything I wanted, anytime I wanted it . . . without having to ask anyone? What if I had enough money to be free from dependence upon anything or anyone? What if . . .? Am I the only one that does this . . . ?

The truth is most lottery winners manage to blow through all their winnings within three to five years. For those who raked in a really huge win—say over a hundred million dollars—they suddenly find themselves redefined as some kind of fiscal empire. Investments, money management, employees, stock market cycles, global currency exchange, become daily concerns. The "freedom" of all that money chains those winners down with new responsibilities. The "hands-out" posture of friends and family dissolves trust and deepens suspicions.

Wealth can batten down and beat up the spirit as much as poverty. The sixties slang that called money “bread” was right on target. But it is the bread “that perishes,” the bread that never frees or feeds for eternal life.

The only way to experience the exhilarating freedom of an unbounded life is to bind ourselves to the one God has sent—to trust in Jesus as the true bread of life. (Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things.) When we put our hope and trust in Jesus, we can experience true freedom. We’re no longer chained to money and material things, that daily grind of trying to get enough or get more for ourselves. Once our hearts and souls are bound to Christ, we can take off without fear on the most daring flights, on the most exciting excursions. (To live without fear. To serve without fear. Outreach without fear. Christ is holding us. He won’t let go.) In fact, if you dare to dream great dreams for God, and you dare to soar in new stratospheres of service and mission, the more tied to Christ, the more tethered to the Word, you need to be.

Turning over the kite string to Christ puts us in the sure hands of a master flyer. When the winds come up and the going gets gusty, we have only to ask to be held tighter. The firmer our connection to Christ, the more spectacular our airborne antics can become.

All people are born to be free. All people are bound to be free. Our text gives a wonderful picture of what heaven will be like. No hunger, no thirst. To that we can add no tears, no pain, no sin. That the life in heaven that awaits us; through faith in Jesus. When we have Jesus, we have everything we really need.

It is the invisible tether of faith, trust, and love in the person of Christ Jesus that allows us to take flight, to fly without fear. Even when the storms of life come on the horizon . . . even when everyone is whirling in the wind and everything is spinning out of control, Christians go out to meet the storm. Christians embrace the wind. And pass out kites.

Go fly a kite.

Can you turn to the person next to you and say: Go fly a kite! This week, when you see one another on the streets, or call each other on the phone, say this as your good-bye: “Go fly a kite.”