

## **Rolling With The Spirit**

Ezekiel 1:15-21 & John 3:8

July 17, 2016 ~ Blessing of the Bikes ~ Rev. Jo Ramsey

Do you remember the first time you rode a bike? I was about five or six. I learned in our back alley over one weekend. My brother Rick taught me and all the neighborhood kids helped.

You remember how it feels? It seems virtually impossible at the time. You're terrified, and then all of the sudden, you're riding. You glance back; your teacher has let go. You're on your own.

A few years later I remember getting up really early and taking my bike out by myself. It had this super-cool banana seat and really high handle bars. You remember those? It was a hand-me-down, but it was so cool! Well, I wrecked my bike that morning, and those cool high handle bars gave me a big, fat lip!

I went home in tears and waited for my mom to wake up. She checked me over, gave me an ice pack and a hug, and the next morning she said, 'Why don't you get your bike out and go for a ride?' She knew it was best for me to get back in the saddle, so to speak. Otherwise, I'd start worrying about falling again and decide to stop riding my bike. She didn't want me to be afraid.

There is something about riding a bike that is inherently and intimately connected to fear... facing our fear, that is. Riding a bike requires taking our feet off the ground...trusting that movement will keep us balanced... believing that two spinning, skinny wheels are somehow enough.

I think that's why there is also something uniquely freeing about riding a bike. Because it requires that we face our fears---on our own. We tune into the present moment, which can set us free from our present worries. We rely on our own power, and realize we can get from here to there all by ourselves.

Bicycling soon becomes an instinct of sorts; our muscles remember it. So much so that it's become a catch phrase for something once learned, never forgotten --- "It's like riding a bike." We're built to keep moving.

Today, we're thinking about bikes and motor cycles and riding on wheels of all kinds. Ezekiel thought about wheels a lot. His vision is popular even in the secular world. In fact, the first listing that pops up when you type "Ezekiel's wheel within a wheel" into your search engine, isn't religious at all! You know what comes up? Ancient Aliens?!?

Evidently, this 'wheel within a wheel' vision really strikes a chord with the UFO enthusiasts. They think Ezekiel actually saw a UFO. Here's their logic, if you could call it that: Ezekiel's wheel within a wheel is not one dimensional, not two flat concentric circles. It's actually three dimensional, a wheel within a wheel on different planes. Really, it's a gyroscope--a spinning wheel in which the axis of rotation is free to assume any orientation by itself. So, when rotating, the axis is unaffected by tilting or rotating. Because of this, gyroscopes are useful for measuring and maintaining orientation. They're used in aircraft, helicopters, ships, rockets, and the space station to maintain

equilibrium and determine direction. So now you can see how the ancient alien theorists have drawn the conclusion that Ezekiel didn't so much have a vision of God, as have ... well, a UFO sighting.

Alien space craft aside, Ezekiel's vision, which he experienced somewhere between 590-570 BC, got me to thinking about the wheel and when it first appears in the archeological record. Opinions vary, but it seems the first wheels show up about 4500 BC in Mesopotamia. But they aren't on vehicles...they're potter's wheels, used to make bowls and pots! We don't see wheels on vehicles until 3500 BC. That's still more than 5000 years ago, so wheels have been "around" a long time. Get it?

Wheels are absolutely essential to modern life in about a million ways. Not only are they fundamental to modern transportation, they are in our dishwashers, vacuum cleaners, computers, electric tooth brushes, the list goes on and on.

Because they spin and revolve, and take us places, wheels have become a symbol for the passing of time, and have found their way into many of our song lyrics, as well.

Who doesn't know, 'The Wheels on the Bus' ...go round and round, round and round....?

Many of us remember the song by Blood, Sweat and Tears...

*"What goes up must come down,*

*Spinnin' wheel got to go 'round.*

*Talkin' 'bout your troubles it's a cryin' sin,*

*Ride a painted pony let the spinnin' wheel spin"*

David Clayton-Thomas who wrote 'Spinning Wheel,' was inspired by a Joni Mitchell song called 'The Circle Game,' a song about growing up and getting older.

*"And the seasons go round and round,*

*and the painted ponies go up and down.*

*We're captive on a carousel of time.*

*We can't return, we can only look behind from where we came*

*and go round and round and round in the Circle Game."*

Wheels are a symbol of change. And for most of us, change is hard. Change is scary. Change is sad. Usually, we humans prefer things to stay the same, even if they aren't that great.

The trouble is, nothing stays the same. Life really is a circle game. The moment we get settled, we have to move, change jobs, deal with a new diagnosis, say good bye, say hello, start a new grade, graduate, start over. The only constant in life is change.

God designed life that way. Seasons change, people change, circumstances change, even the mountains and rivers change. If we don't change, we don't grow. If we don't grow, we aren't really living.

Ezekiel writes to a people who have seen great change. The people are in exile. They've lost everything--their homeland, their temple, their holy city. They don't know who they are anymore. For them, God dwells in Jerusalem. They've left him behind in the Ark, in the temple. They find themselves in a foreign land. Their faith is crumbling. It is the Babylonian Exile.

Some of you may feel in exile, or you remember when you've been there. Most of us have experienced a time when we lost our sense of home. It can happen when we actually leave home and start college, or when we move from one place to another. It can happen during a time of transition, when a relationship changes, or when our anxiety level is high. In the midst of exile, we aren't sure who we are anymore. We feel disoriented, scared, alone and abandoned.

Against this backdrop comes Ezekiel's prophetic message---A whole book of rich, colorful visions...Images that speak of who God is and where we can find him when we're in exile, when everything's changing.

He starts with the great throne. Ezekiel says God is king. Don't forget it! God is sovereign, no matter what it might seem. God is above all and through all and in all. He is in control.

Ezekiel also sees a rainbow -- this reminds us that God is a promise maker and a promise keeper. No matter what storms we face, God will not leave us nor forsake us.

The prophet also describes many eyes emphasizing that God sees everything. Nothing can escape God's vision. He knows what we are going through.

And at the center of it all is the wheel within the wheel reminding us first, that God is on the move. God cannot be left behind! His living spirit goes with us wherever we go, even into Exile!

Ezekiel also wants to reassure the people that life, like a wheel, will come full-circle. Sometimes one spoke of the wheel is up at the top, and the next moment, another is. The wheel is always spinning, always moving. "Do not to despair; you will be raised up in due time. God will bring you around."

For change is part of God's plan, and God's Spirit stands right in the middle of it all. The Spirit blows where it will—we cannot control it. We may not know where the Spirit is leading us. We might not see the path ahead. We might feel afraid. But we can trust that God's spirit will guide us no matter how dark it seems, orient us no matter how lost we feel, keep us balanced no matter how overwhelmed we are, and move us forward into a hope-filled future, no matter how bleak things look.

So today, no matter whether you ride a bike, or a motor cycle, or a skate board or stroller or a walker or wheelchair, may you ride with the Spirit, taking holding of the freedom and power and hope that God intends. As we say these days, "this is how we roll!!!"

In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.