

Jim Gill

May 20, 2018

“Wind and Fire”

Psalm 104: 24-34;35b John 15: 26-27; 16:4b-15 Acts 2:1-12

INTRODUCTION

At Christmas we celebrate the birth of Christ, our Savior. On Easter Sunday we celebrate Jesus’ victorious new birth—his resurrection from death to new life. On Pentecost Sunday we celebrate the birth of the church.

In the Upper Room on the night in which he was betrayed, Jesus gave his followers a glimpse of what was to come for them. Over the next 40 days Jesus appeared to them on various occasions. After he ascended into heaven they spent 10 days waiting, praying, and anticipating. Then, at Pentecost the disciples were given the push that took them from the Upper Room to the Outer Courts. It was the sound of wind and the touch of fire. Hear the word of the Lord from Acts 2:1-13

\*\*\*

I’m not going to say anything about the Royal Wedding...except that the sermon by the American Episcopal Bishop from North Carolina was great. That’s the only part I watched about the wedding. It looked nice but it couldn’t compare to our daughter’s Birthday Celebration. The cake had 29 candles. Now there was some wind and fire. In our family, when you get to 30 you get the numeral 3 and numeral 0 to avoid a fire hazard.

What happened at Pentecost was a day of Wind and Fire.

A book titled Blame It on the Weather tells about some extraordinary events that occurred when wind turned into tornadoes, especially with regard to animals. It tells about a tornado that churned through a dog boarding kennel in Michigan. Later one of the dogs in that kennel was found high in a tree half a mile away--unhappy, no doubt, but unharmed.

There was a bull weighing some 1,400 pounds who was resting in his stall which was attached to the barn by a heavy logging chain. A tornado passed by. Afterward the barn was found sixty feet away. The bull, also apparently unhurt, was still attached to its stall.

Another tornado tore all the shingles off one side of a school, raced across a road, took the roof off a barn, crossed the road again, and lifted a horse about thirty feet before setting him down. Again, it was unharmed . . .

A cow in that same area was found lying on her back, four legs in the air, anchored to the ground by her horns. The cow was otherwise unhurt, but the farmer chose not to milk her . . . He thought the milk might be sour after such a traumatic event. (1)

Now that was some wind.

What sent the 120 disciples from huddled in an Upper Room into a crowded courtyard was a SOUND like a mighty rushing wind. It wasn't a wind; it was the Sound of a Wind. If it had been a wind it would have blown out the fire that came and rested above the heads of the disciples when they were filled with the Holy Spirit. They were filled in the room but they were spilled into the streets. . It was so powerful that a room couldn't hold it. It reminded me of the last song that Texas Avenue Band played at the Shrimp and Catfish festival after 3 hours of playing. They played, "We Gotta Get Out of this Place."

Throughout the Old Testament fire is emblematic of the presence of God. Moses heard the Lord call him to be the deliverer of the children of Israel from bondage in Egypt from a bush that was burning but was not consumed. As they left Egypt they were led by a Cloud by day and a Pillar of Fire by night. When Moses went up on Mount Sinai to talk with God and receive the 10 commandments there was fire on the mountain. Elijah called upon the Lord on Mount Carmel to consume his sacrifice with fire.

In the wind and fire of the Spirit that invaded the hearts of the people that day, there was an answer to the question raised by suffering. The disciples had suffered. Their leader had suffered. He died a terrible death. He shocked them by coming back from the grave. Then he left a second time. His followers were brokenhearted, wondering how they were going to live with such a crushing blow.

We know that life involves suffering. We also know that suffering can produce character and strength. Proverbs says, "Iron sharpens iron," but butter, not so much. Facing painful problems head on can lead to emotional maturity. The pain we experience may cause us to grow stronger. I suspect this is why some of us are willing to take on hard things in life. We take on projects the results from which we may never see. Fifty years ago Dave Corder took on a project of starting the Baytown Symphony and last night we had a party to celebrate that. He accepted the challenge to start an orchestra with no instruments. He was given \$1,000 and went to the Salvation Army to buy whatever \$1,000 would buy in 1968. It is the hard things — not the easy ones — that change lives.

In 1962 at Rice University Stadium President Kennedy said, "We choose to go to the Moon! We choose to go to the Moon in this decade and do the other things, not because they are easy, but because they are hard; because that goal will serve to organize and measure the best of our energies and skills, because that challenge is one that we are willing to accept, one we are unwilling to postpone, and one we intend to win, and the others, too."<sup>[10]</sup>

He also asked, "Why does Rice play Texas?" 1

At Pentecost God grabbed our attention and showed us one more time how much he loves us. The irony is that God's answer comes through suffering. When

we are suffering, pushed to the limits of our endurance, we ask questions. Perhaps it is when we are suffering that we are better equipped to listen for an answer. Job asked a lot of questions. I think Job, Jesus' disciples, and all people who suffer are raising questions that can be summed up in one great big basic question. When we cry to God out of our suffering, it is simply our way of asking God, "Do you love me?" Pentecost was God's definitive "Yes!" to that question.

Family is the place where suffering gets shared. It is the place where love is always waiting. And the absolute security of that ever-present love entering into our suffering is what gives us courage to enter the world's suffering in order to change it in whatever way we can. Jesus had already answered the question, "Do you love me?" In case the disciples hadn't heard the answer clearly enough, the wind and fire of the Spirit at Pentecost proved it.

We don't have to go looking for suffering. It comes to us all. It does not discriminate. The pain and suffering that has come out of the shooting in Santa Fe is unimaginable. The devastation that came in the explosion in Pasadena yesterday is gut-wrenching. Hopefully the pain in these moments will move us to action that will stop and prevent further suffering.

The wind and fire of the Spirit served as a powerful demonstration of something Jesus had said would come. They were so filled with the Spirit, so filled with joy that to a somber crowd of onlookers they looked like a bunch of happy drunks. Hecklers in the crowd that gathered accused them of being drunk at 9:00 in the morning.

Pentecost was the day that the church was born. But that wasn't the end of it. That was only the beginning. The mission goes on as God's Spirit today bestows Christ's peace, forgives sins and draws people together in Jesus' name.

If you read the rest of the chapter you will see that Peter stood up amidst throngs of people in the street and said, "Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs but you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to a cross. But God raised him from the dead, and we all are witnesses of this fact. Exalted to the right hand of God he has poured out Holy Spirit upon us. Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ."

When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, "Brothers what shall we do?"

Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."

They did repent and Luke tells us that 3000 were added to the church on that day. The birth of the church happened in an instant--just like our physical births

happen in an instant. One instant we're in the womb and then the next instant we're in the world. But the birth of the church was years in the making—three years of Jesus loving and healing and teaching and demonstrating God's power and sharing God's peace.

Three thousand people were baptized. But perhaps the greatest miracle of all was that a motley group of cowering followers had turned into an inspired band of fearless leaders.

The last verses of chapter 2 tell us that the followers of Jesus devoted themselves to the apostles teaching, the breaking of bread and the prayers and the Lord added to their number daily those that were being saved.

If there is a lesson in the birthday of the church that took place on Pentecost it is that though Jesus coming didn't bring World Peace, he did bring peace to people from all over the world. The followers of Jesus today are more diverse than ever. The church started out as Jews from all over the world. Now it is made up of Jews and Gentiles from all over the world. It is so diverse that in a church in England an African American Episcopal Bishop from North Carolina preaches at the Royal Wedding of the Duke of Essex and a Bi-racial divorcee from Hollywood.

Jill Duffield, editor of Presbyterian Outlook describes it this way. "An in-breaking of the Holy Spirit means a great equalizing has happened. The world gets turned upside down and inside out. Men and women, young and old, slave and free - the Spirit pours over all. Everyone is on a level playing field when it comes to the power and outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

Pentecost is revolutionary because the wind blows down barriers and the flames burn down walls between peoples separated by geography, culture, language, nation, class, race and every other human-created category.

Pentecost is revolutionary, turning upside down and inside out every human-constructed category, divide and barrier. ... Nothing will separate us from the love of God through Christ Jesus our Lord, and through the gift of the Holy Spirit, nothing will separate us from one another, either.

Pentecost is far more than the church's birthday; it turns the whole world inside out and upside down. Like so many revolutions, the initial fervor and excitement gives way to a yearning for the familiar, even if the status quo was oppressive, limiting and less than life-giving. Better the constraining categories we know than doing the work of learning a whole new way of life.

In some places the church traded the revolution of Pentecost for the comfort and complacency of silos of sameness. Pentecost becomes the day on the liturgical calendar to celebrate the birthday of the church instead of a day to remember

that our entire world should be turned upside down and inside out when we commit to following Jesus Christ. Pentecost means that our circles of concern are expanded and multiplied. We are to be bi-lingual, tri-lingual, multi-lingual - always striving to speak more fluently and listen more closely until we come to a place where we know each other's languages so well we dream one another's dreams.

What happen to the revolution of Pentecost? Where did the wind and fire of the Spirit go? When is the last time something in the church or in the community caused you to be utterly perplexed because you could never have imagined anything like it?

After revolution comes the hard, time-consuming, slow work of building a new order- a new way of life together. That's true for Pentecost, too. A Spirit-constituted community, if it is to last and grow, requires work. ... The rubble of once formidable walls must be addressed, hauled away, recycled, and reused. Creating a new common vocabulary comes only with time and shared experience. The pull of the old, familiar categories, patterns and our own native language is strong. Some would rather sing "happy birthday," blow out the candles and go back to the same pew they've sat in for years. Spirit-community asks not just a lot of us, but everything we've got. 2

Thank God for the gift of the Holy Spirit that arrived with the sound of a mighty wind and dancing tongues of fire. Thanks be to God for the gift of ...Wind and Fire.

Let's pray.

O Lord, we give you thanks for the gift of the Holy Spirit, who guides us, and gives us gifts by which to respond to your call. We give you thanks for the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Some among us utter wisdom and knowledge; we give you thank for their minds. May they be led to further their thinking that we may become more enlightened with increasing truth. Some in our midst have gifts of healing; we give you thanks for their compassion and patience. In their search to ease the suffering of others, may they help overcome the causes of pain. Some work with their hands or create fine art; we give you thanks for their imagination and skill. May their creations be tributes that honor your name, and reminders to us that we serve you alone. There are some with good business sense, others with talents they volunteer; we give you thanks for their discipline and service. Help us to learn from them how to use our time wisely, to apportion our talents so that others rejoice. We give you thanks for the fruit that comes as a result of using the gifts of the Holy Spirit for your glory—love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, and self control. You amaze us, O God, with the breadth of your love. You continue to fill us with the breath of your Spirit. For all your mercies we give you thanks.

1. **John F. Kennedy “We Choose to go to the Moon” September 12, 1962, Rice University Stadium.**
2. **Jill Duffield Looking Into the Lectionary May 20, 2018**

### **PRAYER FOR GRADUATES AFTER THEIR PRESENTATION.**

This morning we are honoring four High School graduates as they move on to THEIR NEW SCHOOLS! As these graduates move on to other places they will leave behind old friends—from preschool, from elementary school, from Junior High and High School. They will make new friends too. Even as these graduates move on to new and different things there is a sense for us that as followers of Jesus we are NEVER through with school. There is always something more for us to learn from Jesus.

Lord, we pray for these graduates. We give you thanks for all that they have accomplished. We pray that you will go with them as they move on to new challenges and adventures. Keep them close. Guard and guide them. Give them an assurance that they are part of a larger community of faith. Lead them to others who can support them and encourage them.