

IDLEWILD PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

The Reverend Joshua H. Narcisse
Sunday, June 8, 2025

Nearer Than The Wind

Acts 2:1-5, 14-21

When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.

Now there were devout Jews from every people under heaven living in Jerusalem.

But Peter, standing with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed them, "Fellow Jews and all who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and listen to what I say. Indeed, these are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only nine o'clock in the morning. No, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel:

*'In the last days it will be, God declares,
that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh,
and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,
and your young men shall see visions,
and your old men shall dream dreams.*

*Even upon my slaves, both men and women,
in those days I will pour out my Spirit,
and they shall prophesy.*

*And I will show portents in the heaven above
and signs on the earth below,
blood, and fire, and smoky mist.*

*The sun shall be turned to darkness
and the moon to blood,
before the coming of the Lord's great and glorious day.*

Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.'

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This morning we begin a new sermon series that will carry us through the season of Pentecost. Together each week we will lift up one of the many ways Scripture describes the presence of the Holy Spirit. Wind. Truth. Still Small Voice. Breath.

And together we will wrestle with our understanding of the work of the Holy Spirit that is always and ever stretching us and molding us and sustaining us and sending us out to follow after our resurrected Savior. Together we'll meditate on the work of the Holy Spirit as it forces us to keep up with where God is leading, forces us to respond to the world around us as followers of the Lord Jesus Christ, forces us to reckon with the reality that the Spirit of God has fallen on each of us so completely, so inescapably, that the Holy Spirit is a near to us as our very breath.

Beloved, that is the reality that we confess to be true this day, that God in Spirit dwells with us, in each breath that flows through our body. That God in Spirit journeys with us along the way. That God in Spirit sustains us in the meantime, between the moments of elation and the seasons of silence; between the days where you're convinced God is near and the nights where God seems conspicuously absent; between the questions that go unanswered and the events that are unexplainable and when the weight of life gets unbearable, that is what we confess Beloved, that the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of the Living God is yet at work, holding us together, sustaining us along the journey, and nudging us along the way.

That is what we hold to be true. But that was not true for Peter and the disciples on that first Pentecost Day. No, for Peter and the disciples, the sustaining presence of the Spirit is theoretical at best. They've been told about it, they've been promised it, they've heard mention

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of it. But it is a far-off, hoped-for possibility that has little bearing on their reality. And Beloved, their reality is bleak.

50 days. That is all it's been. 50 days since they've stood at the foot of the cross and born witness to the crucifixion of their teacher, friend, and companion. 50 days since they walked away from that cross carrying the trauma and terror that comes from watching a public execution. 50 days since their world came crumbling down. 50 days since they began grieving the life they once knew. And when we find them this morning they are in the Upper Room. The same room where they last supped with the Savior, the same room where Jesus has appeared to them twice, the same room where things felt normal for the last time. We find them in this same room because sometimes when you're trying to piece things back together the only place you can find comfort is in familiar spaces. That is the only comfort they've got at this point, not the Holy Spirit, but rather shutting themselves in a familiar room filled with familiar faces, familiar scents, familiar personalities and familiar memories.

We've heard over the last 7 weeks the ways Christ appeared to the disciples and promised to be present in their lives. We've heard about Emmaus and breakfast by the sea. We've heard about the grave surrounded by a garden, we've heard about the ways Christ promises to be a Good Shepherd and a Holy Lamb who will be for us our light and our temple. The disciples have knowledge of what Christ promises to do, but the reality is, for all of Christ's promises, for all of ways Christ makes his presence known to them, for all the times they've seen Christ make a way out of now way, make the impossible commonplace, and expose how small and unimaginative their assumptions about God have been. Beloved, for all the ways they have been prepared to

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live out the Gospel, the unknown of what comes next has taken ahold of them so completely, they've decided to find comfort by shutting themselves in a familiar room filled with familiar faces, familiar scents, familiar personalities and familiar memories.

We like what is familiar. We like what is comfortably stable. We don't like it when God decides to accomplish something in our lives through ways and means that we haven't tested, we haven't experienced, we haven't agreed to, we haven't hired, we haven't vetted, we haven't experienced ourselves. We like what is familiar, we are accustomed to God when God shows up between the designated hour set aside for worship each week. We like what is familiar, we are accustomed to God when God shows up and participates in our lives with a similar educational background and social network, when God expresses Godself in familiar faces and places we are comfortable. But when we are asked to confront the unknown and unexpected with unfamiliar tools, we too like the disciples, might begin to wonder if God hasn't lost the plot of our stories? If God is truly aware of what God is asking of us; calling upon us to do?

And given the choice we might find ourselves beginning to choose familiar rooms, filled with familiar faces and familiar memories in every area of our lives, instead of heeding the call of God to go past the familiar and the comfortable in order to carry the transformative, life-liberating, poverty-eradicating, hope-sustaining, love of God to all we meet because we carry it in our very flesh.

Perhaps, that's why it's into this familiar room filled with familiar people that comes an unfamiliar and unexpected experience. The sound of a violent wind comes rushing through the

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room. And I know for a fact Peter looked at John and asked did someone open a window? I just know he did.

Because Beloved, there the disciples are, locked behind closed doors, windows shut, and without warning a violent wind comes rushing through the room, divided tongues as of fire rests among them, and then this group of faithful folks who all speak the same language all of a sudden are speaking in unfamiliar tongues. And I wonder, I wonder if it could have been anything other than a rushing wind that could have convinced the disciples of exactly how near God's presence would remain to them now that their teacher has ascended.

Wind. So completely normal, almost negligible. Wind. Wind that Peter would've felt on his face each time he set sail to catch fish. Wind that Matthew would've felt passing through his tax collector's booth in those days before Jesus came by and said "Follow me." Wind. So near it blows by you and surrounds you so completely it feels part of you.

I wonder if it could've been anything other than the wind, wind that caresses our flesh tenderly, wind that blows past each of us equally, wind that goes where it will freely—I wonder if it could've been anything other than a rushing wind that could've convinced the disciples that God would indeed be nearer to them than even the very wind.

Perhaps, that is what brought to Peter's mind the words of the Prophet Joel. Perhaps, that familiar wind that showed up at the most unexpected time and in an unfamiliar way reminded Peter of just how big and inescapable and near God was to him and is to all of us. That wherever the wind goes God's spirit goes also.

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Perhaps that is why when Peter rises to preach the initial sermon at the Church's birthday party, the words of the Prophet Joel slip from his mind through his lips and he proclaims to the Parthians, the Medes, the Elamites, the Mesopotamians, Judeans and Cappadocians, to folks who don't even like each other, vote the same way, nor claim the same God:

I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh,
and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,
and your young men shall see visions,
and your old men shall dream dreams.

Even upon my slaves, both men and women,
in those days I will pour out my Spirit,
and they shall prophesy.

And I will show portents in the heaven above
and signs on the earth below,
blood, and fire, and smoky mist.

The sun shall be turned to darkness
and the moon to blood,
before the coming of the Lord's great and glorious day.

Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.'

All flesh. God promises that God's spirit isn't exclusive, isn't limited to the familiar faces and spaces we are comfortable with. God pours out God's spirit upon all flesh, on people we know and those we don't. On every member of this Church and every attendee at More Than A

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Meal. On every child that came to VBS and every one that would never call Idlewild home but knows the recreation program as their only safe place. On all flesh, unfamiliar flesh, non-conforming flesh, flesh that has been deemed unacceptable, dangerous flesh, incarcerated flesh, undocumented flesh. All flesh receives the Spirit of God that is nearer than even the very wind.

The Spirit of God that lays claim to our lives and will not let us go until we have in and through our lives become ministers of the Gospel. Maybe not up here in a black robe or in the hospital room with a collar on. But ministers of the Gospel nonetheless, each of us who the Spirit has been poured out upon to prophesy to a world broken by sin, to see visions of a world soon coming but not yet, to dream dreams of a world that looks like the kingdom of God. ||

Beloved, have you ever felt the wind, caress your face on a bright and glorious day? Have you ever felt the wind pushing against you as you tried to take shelter during an unexpected storm? Have you ever felt the wind break through an unbearably hot Memphis day? Then you've been reminded of just how near God is to *you*, and to all flesh. Then you've been reminded also, of how inescapable the call of God is upon your life, to bear witness to the crucified, resurrected, and living Lord; the one who is Love with flesh on, Jesus the Christ. May we live out our call each day as faithfully as the very wind that blows past each of us wherever it wills. To the glory of God, Amen.