

# Story and Meditation: Pentecost

May 31, 2020

Pentecost Sunday

Acts 2:1-21

by *Eric Anderson*

There is a phrase that's common among the koa'e kea. Well, there are several phrases that are common among the koa'e kea, things that you and I would find at least a little familiar. They say things like, "What a beautiful day!" and "Did you see that big fish?" and "What a delicious squid!"

When English-speaking people say that last one, they tend to use the Italian word "calamari."  
"What delicious calamari!"

There is another phrase, however, that they tend to use and it confused one of the young ones a great deal. It was, "I'm waiting on the wind."

It was something that the adult birds would say to one another in response to a greeting. "Good morning!" one would say. "How are you today?" The other would call back, "I'm waiting on the wind!"

What confused the chick was that, as far as she could tell, the birds who said that weren't waiting on anything. From her point of view in the nest, they were already flying. Sometimes one of her parents would say it to a passing bird while they were resting on the nest, but just as often it was a passing bird who called it to her parents as they flew by.

They were already in the air, flying along. How could they be waiting on the wind?

She thought about asking her parents, but she didn't even know how to ask the question.

It didn't take too long until she was big enough and old enough to fly for herself, and with some of the other young birds in nearby nests, she took to the air. Her father was her primary flying instructor. One morning she woke to find him sniffing at the air. "What are you doing?" she asked.

"I'm just waiting on the wind," he said.

Now she could ask: "What does that mean?"

He looked at her thoughtfully. Then he said, "Come with me."

The two of them took to the air. They flew along in the mountain air, flapping steadily. But then they flew into a patch of air that had been warmed by the sun on the rocks below, making a rising column. They shifted to gliding and soaring, circling around and around.

They flew down to the sea along the cliffsides, where the strong breeze shifted every time they turned another corner. This was tricky, requiring constant adjustment even as she beat her wings in time. Then they found a patch of calm air, demanding more effort to keep themselves aloft even though it did not turn them around.

Each wind, each breeze, each movement of the air required a different kind of flying.

When she returned to the nest, her father asked, "Do you see what it means to wait on the wind?"

"Oh, yes," she said. "We're all just waiting on the wind."

Jesus had told his disciples to wait on the wind. According to Luke, during those few days he spent with them after his resurrection, one of the things he promised was the gift of the Holy Spirit, and that it would be given in just a few days. The word he probably used, "ruach," has a wide range of meanings in Hebrew. It means spirit, as in something that lives but that you can't touch, but it also means breath and breeze and wind. In Genesis, you may recall, the "spirit of God" moved over the waters. That's the same word: the ruach Adonai, the breath of God, the wind of God, the spirit of God.

Jesus' followers, numbering about a hundred twenty people including Jesus' mother and brothers, waited on the wind. They probably had some ideas about what it might look like, but if you think about how surprising Jesus' ministry had been they were also thinking that they might be wrong.

When it came, it came with the rush of a great wind. This was no gentle breath of God. This was the gale of God. This was the air that moved them out of their house and into the street. This was the tempest that had them telling the story of Jesus' death and resurrection. This was the storm in which their voices thundered in all the languages of the region.

Can you imagine the turmoil? Can you imagine the confusion? Can you imagine the disruption? Can you imagine the rush of a mighty wind?

No wonder some of them scoffed and said they were drunk. Of all the explanations for the clamor of Pentecost, that was the quickest and the easiest.

Peter's explanation was not the quickest and the easiest. Joel doesn't take up a lot of room in the Bible. There's only three chapters. About two-thirds of the book is concerned with a terrible locust plague that infested Judah in his day. I still find it strange that Joel sprang to Peter's mind in the midst of all that tempestuous confusion.

What's strange about Joel's prophecy was the way he leapt from reassurance that the locusts would disappear and that bountiful harvests would resume to this declaration that God's spirit would be poured out to... well, such a wide range of people. You'd expect a few people to receive it in each generation, as had been true in Israel's accounts of its history. But no, suddenly it's the entire next generation that is speaking God's will, and it's not just the sons, but the daughters as well. Wait, it's not just the next generation. The previous one, the kupuna, they're dreaming the will of God. The young ones are seeing visions. Even the slaves, the ones who are at the bottom of the social order, the ones who may not even be Jews, they would also receive this outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

It's a whole new world, folks. It's a whole new world.

Alison J. Buttrick Patton writes at "Starting with Scripture," "Given our tendency to imagine the future as an extension of our past, I wonder whether the disciples may just have assumed that they could do whatever it was the Holy Spirit was going to empower them to do, in-between fishing and mending their old nets. Might they have been asking, 'When will this Holy Spirit show up, so we can get back to living our lives?'"

"Then the Holy Spirit did show up, and it became instantly clear that there was no going back. Instead, an entirely new course was laid out before them, a holy summons to speak to people they'd never before addressed, in languages they didn't know they could speak, about wonders they barely grasped themselves. So that was that. No going back, after all. Only forward into an uncertain future, a blank calendar in one hand, and a Holy Spirit flame to light the way."

Going forward until an entirely new world. Waiting on the wind.

There's a useful proverb that says, "Those who fail to plan, plan to fail." There are a lot of parts of life in which that is a very helpful guide. Shopping. Cooking. Construction. Art projects. Readyng a nation for a pandemic. The thing I prepare every week: Worship.

It has its limits, however, because preparing for the Holy Spirit is simultaneously necessary and impossible. We prepare for the Holy Spirit by opening our hearts and souls, but the Holy Spirit doesn't give us hints about where we go from there. I drag out this example all the time, but here it is again. I entered college intending a quite different career, and left it for seminary. I graduated seminary with the idea of a pretty straightforward path in ministry. I had prepared for it. My plans did not include interim ministry, a computer consulting business, a communications position with a conference, or serving in Hawai'i. I had to adapt to them all.

I had to wait on the wind.

This global pandemic has changed us. It's changed our community. It's changed our nation. It has changed our world. Unlike a large number of other people who are industriously producing predictions about how it has changed these things, I have no insight to share about that.

What I do know is that this is a time when we are all waiting on the wind, seeing how it blows. This is a time when we will be adapting because whatever the future looks like it will not be like the recent past.

Can we, I pray, seize the vision that Simon Peter did, and insist that this be a future of inclusion and of hope? Can we embrace the Holy Spirit moving among people regardless of race, age, social status, even religious creed? Can we help one another, all of the one anothers, as we wait on the wind?

People are marching in several cities in this country. They have suffered too much to be silent. COVID-19 has disproportionately affected African Americans and Hispanics, who are significantly overrepresented in those hospitalized and those who have died. The deaths of Ahmaud Arbery in Brunswick, Georgia, of Breonna Taylor in Louisville, Kentucky, and of George Floyd in Minneapolis, Minnesota, follow the pattern of too many deaths in the African American community. According to a 2019 study in the Proceedings of Natural Science, black men are two and a half times more likely to die at the hands of police officers than white men.

Can we wait on the wind to change this society so this happens no longer? Or might we need to be the wind ourselves?

Debra J. Mumford writes at *Working Preacher*, “How many of our differences could be transcended if we allowed the power of the Holy Spirit to reign in our lives? What miracles could the Holy Spirit perform in our churches and communities if we embraced it and invited it into our midst? How many hearts and minds could the Holy Spirit possibly transform, if we prayed for the Holy Spirit to have its ways in our communities?”

We are all waiting on the wind, soaring on the wind, flying through the wind as it tosses us into another day. Let us embrace the Spirit of God so it may carry us all to justice and peace.

Amen.