

# Everyone Knows It's Windy

May 19, 2024

Acts 2:1-21

John 15:26-27, 16:4b-15

Some of you are asking, "Pastor, did you really get your sermon title from a repeated line in the 1967 song performed by The Association, "Windy"? Some of you, as I say, are asking that. The rest of you have never heard of the song.

But the answer, as you'd probably guess, is "Yes."

I'm afraid that that means that my sermon title is somewhat misleading. I always remember the story of Pentecost with that rush of a mighty wind, a sound heard by all the people of Jerusalem, a sound that brought them together into a crowd to meet the disciples-becoming-apostles as they emerged from their rented house. I always imagine that the crowd marveled at the sight of those, "Divided tongues, as of fire, [that had] appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them."

Unfortunately for my overly imaginative memory, that's not what Luke wrote. As far as we can tell, the sound of the wind happened inside the house, and only inside the house. The tongues "as of fire" (which implies that Luke didn't know what they were, either) also happened inside. How certain am I of this? Well, pretty certain. Because when the crowd got a word in edgewise amidst all that the little group of Christians were saying, they didn't comment on the wind. They had nothing to say about flames in the hair.

They talked about the miracle of the languages. That was what they'd heard. That was what impressed them. The fire and the wind... they missed them.

Nevertheless: Everyone knows it's windy.

Luke made an interesting choice for that word we've translated "wind." As D. Mark Davis writes at [LeftBehindAndLovingIt](#), "The word 'wind' (πνοή) has the same root as the word which is typically translated 'spirit' (πνεύματος) below. It could also mean 'breath.' This particular variation of that root only appears one other time in the Scriptures, in Acts 17:25, which says that God 'gives to all mankind life and breath and everything.'" In making that choice, Luke aligned his description of the Pentecost event with the description of the Creation, when "the Spirit of God," or "a wind from God," or "the breath of God" – those are all sound translations from Hebrew into English of that phrase in Genesis 1 – moved over the waters. Jewish writers repeatedly used the word "ruach" – which means breath or wind or spirit – to refer to some of God's activity, which included the inspiration of prophets to speak God's word.

So if the sign is a mighty wind, a mighty breath, a mighty spirit, well, everyone knows it's windy.

The Spirit chose an interesting day to manifest. Fifty days after the celebration of Passover, the "pente" of "Pentecost," the city had filled with visitors again for another holiday, this time Shavuot. It's described as a wheat harvest festival in Deuteronomy. By the first century, it also commemorated God's gift of the Law to Moses on Mount Sinai, which was, you'll recall, strongly associated with wind and fire. To the little group of Jesus followers in Jerusalem, numbering around 120 or so, the association would have been immediate and clear. God is doing something as new and dramatic as the gift of the Law.

Everyone knows it's windy.

That's why the Holy Spirit received so much attention in the writings of early Christians. The Apostle Paul spoke of it repeatedly, using the phrase "Holy Spirit" five times in Romans alone. The reading from John's Gospel today tries to explain the gift of the Holy Spirit to Christ's followers. Of all the gospel writers, Luke really emphasized the Holy Spirit, using the phrase more than twice as often as any of the others, and in the book of Acts, he wrote "Holy Spirit" forty-two times.

Luke wanted everyone to know it's windy.

Do you know it's windy?

Do you know that God hasn't left us abandoned and on our own with the recorded memories of Jesus and the early thinkers of Christ's Church as our only guide? Do you know that the Holy Spirit was not just the gift of the early Church, but also the not-so-early Church, the medieval Church, the Renaissance era Church, the pre-modern Church, the modern Church, and now the post-modern Church? Do you know that light and truth are not the exclusive possession of those long ago, but potentially accessible to you and I right now? Do you know, to use the UCC phrase, "God is still speaking"?

Do you know it's windy?

There is some justice to Karl Marx's critique that religion is the opiate of the people. The problem with the Holy Spirit of God is that, well, it's not controllable. It tends to rile things up. It disrupts our customs and conventions. Worst of all, it tends to tell us we've got things wrong just when we were certain we were right.

The section of the Prophet Joel that Simon Peter used to explain what was happening is one of those disruptive declarations. As Frank L. Crouch writes at Working Preacher, "All flesh — boys and girls, young and old, free and slaves — whether they be women or men — are graced with the Spirit's direct connection to the prophecies, visions, and dreams of God (vv. 16-21). This

was institutionally unsettling back then and is institutionally resisted today. In this story, God shows no regard for our structures, hierarchies, or status quo.”

I won't claim to be utterly charmed by our structures, hierarchies, and status quo, but I've got to admit that I know how to live in them. I don't know how to live in their replacements – even the replacements I yearn for.

The problem is that putting God in a box not only doesn't work – since the Holy Spirit tends to burst out of boxes like, well, like the rush of a mighty wind – not only doesn't it work, it produces actual harm. In her novel *Shirley* Charlotte Bronte wrote, ““Your god, sir, is the World. In my eyes, you, too, if not an infidel, are an idolater. I conceive that you ignorantly worship: in all things you appear to me too superstitious. Sir, your god, your great Bel, your fish-tailed Dagon, rises before me as a demon. You, and such as you, have raised him to a throne, put on him a crown, given him a sceptre. ... In his dominions, children grow unloving between parents who have never loved: infants are nursed on deception from their very birth: they are reared in an atmosphere corrupt with lies ... All that surrounds him hastens to decay: all declines and degenerates under his sceptre. Your god is a masked Death.”

Isn't that just what we've done with our attempts to domesticate God? When... everyone knows it's windy?

But why do we want to stay in the box, with our masked Death of a God, anyway? As Melissa Bane Sevier observes in her blog, the disciples inside the house were missing the festival of the harvest in the streets. There was a party outside and they were missing it. She writes, “The church isn't the church if it stays indoors. Set down your donut and go find the baklava.”

That's a comparison that works for me. I like donuts, don't get me wrong. But I love baklava.

Christ's Church is not supposed to be a collection of Gloomy Guses and Gabrielles sitting off in a room by themselves. As a confirmed introvert, I see the attraction of that. As a Christian pastor, I can't affirm it. Because I know it's windy.

Debie Thomas writes at JourneyWithJesus.net, “There is no way to overstate how much we need to gather as God's people right now and ask the Holy Spirit to instruct us, shape us, remake us, and commission us. We need fresh languages of bridge-building. We need new words to rekindle love. We need the wind and fire of God to challenge our complacencies, reset our priorities, ease our anxieties, and move us out.”

We are unlikely to be subject to the rush of a mighty wind (except the trade winds, of course). We are unlikely to see something that looks like flames but probably isn't dancing on our heads. We are unlikely to speak other people's languages without a great deal of work and study.

We are likely to feel the promptings of the Holy Spirit. We are likely to be challenged by the words of the Scriptures, which may not speak to us now as they did the first time we heard

them. We are likely to be inspired by the example of other people, particularly when they do something unexpected, like, oh, say, the rather comic Simon Peter, the one who said so many foolish things to Jesus, the one who denied him on the night Jesus needed him most, when someone like Simon Peter stands up and quotes Joel (Joel?) in an improvised sermon to a crowd of people and leads them to believe.

Because yes: Everyone knows it's windy.

Amen.

*by Eric Anderson*