

SERMON TITLE: "The Winds of Change" (Pentecost Series #2)
SERMON TEXT: Acts 2:1-4, 14-18, 22-24, 37-38
PREACHER: Rev. Kim James
OCCASION: June 7, 2020, at First UMC

INTRODUCTION

Did you notice how powerful the wind was yesterday? Around 7 a.m., my husband Steve and I were sitting at our dining room table eating breakfast and reading the newspaper when all of a sudden, the wind just started blowing. We had our dining room window open, and the loud sound and strong gusts blew into our house. A half hour later, as I drove to the church, I could see branches and overturned trash cans in the streets. A giant piece of plastic lifted off a construction site and was sailing through the air. Empty lots gave up their dirt to the wind.

Maybe that's a little bit what it was like on the day of Pentecost some 2000 years ago. Jews from all around the Mediterranean region had gathered in the city of Jerusalem for an annual Jewish festival. But on this particular Pentecost day, something amazing happened. The followers of Jesus saw fire resting upon each other. And they heard and felt the sound of a rushing, violent wind that filled the house where they were sitting. In and through these events, the Holy Spirit came with transformational power.

Last Sunday was the actual **day** of Pentecost on our Christian calendar, but what happened in Acts 2 was so big, so impactful, that we aren't going to limit our thoughts about Pentecost to just one day. All this month of June, we're going to continue talking about what happened back then and what the Holy Spirit can be doing through us today. Last Sunday, we zeroed in on the *fire* of Pentecost. Today, I want to focus on the *winds* of change.

1—WINDS OF CHANGE IN ACTS 2

Let's begin with the winds of change that were blowing in Acts chapter two. Besides the phenomena of actual wind, there was the Holy Spirit who accompanied it. In both the biblical languages

of Old Testament Hebrew and New Testament Greek, the word for *wind* also means *spirit*. So, almost anywhere in the Bible, when you read the word *wind*, you can also assume and think the word *spirit*. For example, in the creation story in Genesis 1, we read that “a wind from God swept over the face of the waters” (v. 2). That wind from God quite likely was a wind that a meteorologist could have measured. But the Genesis description was also a double *entendre*, a double meaning, a way of *also* saying that God’s Holy Spirit was there, thoroughly engaged in the processes of creation.

Those same Hebrew and Greek words that carry the double meaning of *wind* and *Spirit* also have the third meaning of *breath*. We see an example of this in the other creation story in Genesis chapter two. There God shaped a “man from the dust of the ground” and then “breathed into his nostrils the breath of life” (v. 7). The reason “I can’t breathe” is such a powerful statement in this time of deaths and protests is because we all require the breath of life which is none other than God’s wind and spirit of creation.

Another place we see the connection between Spirit and breath is in one of the post-resurrection appearances of Jesus in John chapter 20. There, Jesus’ disciples were huddled in a house with the doors locked because they were afraid that the authorities who killed Jesus might also come for them. But, even though the doors were locked, the risen “Jesus came and stood among them.” He spoke to the disciples words of peace and forgiveness, and “he breathed on them and said to them, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit’” (v. 22).

Do you hear these many layers of overlapping meaning? Wind, breath, Spirit. The wind of change is present in every aspect of God’s creative and re-creative work. Just as God sweeps the landscape and breathes life into humanity, now here in Acts 2, God infuses and fills the believers with Holy Spirit power. And, wow, what a difference that Holy Spirit makes! The winds of change take scared disciples and turn them into powerful witnesses to the death and resurrection of Jesus. The

winds of change allow communication to happen in new ways and through new people so barriers are overcome. And the winds of change allow new understandings and interpretations of events.

New understandings and interpretations. Let me elaborate on that a little more. One of the main aspects of Peter's sermon to the crowd was calling them to accountability about Jesus' crucifixion. Fifty days earlier, a Jewish crowd had gathered in Jerusalem for the Passover. That's when the authorities unjustly and brutally killed Jesus. What was his crime? He imagined and proclaimed a kingdom ruled by God's values. Jesus spoke out against abuse of power. He stood up for the oppressed. And Jesus overthrew some money changers' tables in the temple. Yes, that's what finally got him killed-- what we in America today would call the exercise of First Amendment rights and maybe a little bit of property damage. What would have been considered a forgivable temper tantrum from a ruling-class person was considered intolerable when it came from a peasant carpenter from Galilee. This teacher of love and healer of sickness was considered a threat against the Jewish nation, so the Jews in authority called upon Roman soldiers to bring Jesus down and silence his voice.

That was 50 days earlier. Now, on the Day of Pentecost, the Jewish listeners came to a new understanding. Because God had raised Jesus from the dead, Jesus' righteousness was vindicated. His cause was proven right and true. It was like they could now finally see the cell-phone video that revealed the injustice. So, the Jews in the audience were "cut to the heart." They felt remorse for what they had done, and were ready to repent and be forgiven of their sins. The winds of change had brought them to a new perspective that allowed them to receive new life through the gift of the Holy Spirit.

2—WINDS OF CHANGE TODAY

Do you hear the parallels with our situation today? Do you already feel how the Pentecost winds of change are blowing right now? Here are some more examples I've been noticing recently.

Just in the past few days, Drew Brees, quarterback for the New Orleans Saints, has repented of his statements against African American players kneeling at football games during the national anthem. The winds of change have helped Brees, Commissioner Roger Goodell, and others in the NFL to realize that Colin Kaepernick and those who joined him were not wrong in their desire to draw attention to police brutality and the deadly treatment of African American people. As the Saints' quarterback said on Friday, "We must stop talking about the flag and shift our attention to the real issues of systemic racial injustice, economic oppression, police brutality, and judicial and prison reform."¹ Yes, this is still controversial in some quarters. But do you feel the Holy Spirit blowing winds of change?

A more church-oriented example comes from the United Methodist Women's organization. In a statement posted on June 1, leaders of UMW decried racism and the violence against black people in America. Even as they made that clear statement, however, they acknowledged and repented of their own historical complicity in this sin. Specifically, they wrote, in the 1890s, "when Ida B. Wells invited legendary" Women's Christian Temperance Union "leader Frances Willard to join in the anti-lynching movement, Willard said no." Willard's "haunting refusal" came from "the false belief that lynching was 'necessary' to protect White women."²

Fortunately, the history of UMW also has more-positive examples of women who worked diligently in their fight against lynching and racism and for civil rights inside and outside the church. Today's leaders of United Methodist Women acknowledge that "there is no easy fix. There exists no single, one-time action that can undo a multigenerational legacy of racist violence."²

Committed, however, to doing this important work, the United Methodist Women made some important decisions this past week. They decided to give away \$21,000, divided into three grants of \$7000, each related to a case of fatal police brutality. Because George Floyd was killed in Minneapolis, one grant will go to the Healing Justice Network in Minnesota. Because Breonna Taylor was killed in Louisville, Kentucky, \$7000 will be given to the Louisville Community Bail Fund. And because Ahmaud

Arbery was killed in Atlanta, the UMW will give a third grant to the NAACP for its work with a justice organization called Just Georgia.²

United Methodist Women leaders also encourage women and men throughout the denomination to read the UMW Reading Program book and *New York Times* bestseller *So You Want to Talk about Race* by Ijeoma Oluo.² Just as Acts 2 points out the repentance and changes that were needed then, we also need to take every opportunity to allow the Holy Spirit to blow winds of change through us today.

CONCLUSION

On Thursday, African American Senator Cory Booker of New Jersey made a statement that's worth repeating. He said,

I just feel that we are in a moment here in America, led by grassroots demand where we can see tremendous change, positive change. . . but I'm always cognizant that change doesn't just happen, it doesn't just, as King said, "roll in on the wheels of inevitability." It has to be worked for, and struggled for, and I think there's a lot more struggle that we have to sustain. But I'm encouraged by seeing people . . . getting out there to demand change.³

A great deal of the power of Pentecost came from the fact that it did just seem to happen. The fire and wind came from God's Holy Spirit. But it still required the cooperation and choice of the people. It still required that they repent of their predetermined ideas and violent ways and accept the changes that God was seeking for their lives individually and as a people. Like them, let's open our hearts to these Holy Spirit winds of change.

¹ https://www.espn.com/nfl/story/_/id/29273182/drew-brees-stands-apology-flag-comments-response-president-trump

² <https://www.unitedmethodistwomen.org/news/black-lives-matter-to-god-and-united-methodist-women>

³ <https://nymag.com/intelligencer/2020/06/cory-booker-on-the-george-floyd-police-brutality-protests.html>