

SERMON
By: Gail Fricker

“Spirit in the Wind”

May 20, 2018

Acts 2:1-21

We tend to be people of habit. We like to do things the same way over and over again. It makes us feel safe and secure – we like to think we know our boundaries. We spend time with people who think the same way as we do, or enjoy doing the same sorts of things, or live in the same sort of way. On the whole we tend to seek out people who affirm our way of life, or who we feel comfortable with. It feels like a safe way to live – and there is nothing wrong with that, as far as it goes.

But, is that the way Jesus wants us to live? Jesus didn't choose his friends because they were the same as him, or because they made him feel good about himself. He chose to spend time with people who were overtly different – the poor, the hungry, the outcast, the sick and the lonely. We hear stories in the Bible again and again. Jesus was a radical and was constantly challenging the people around him and the way they lived, and he always showed them by his example, a better and more compassionate way of living – one grounded in love.

And Jesus knew that the people would need help and guidance to keep living this way after he would no longer be with them – that is why he promised that God would send the Holy Spirit to be a guide and helper, for his disciples, for the people, and for us.

But, we are people of habit. To change the way that we think, and the way in which we behave, takes courage and energy. It's risky. Our comfortable way of life might be compromised. It's so much easier, and way less challenging, to just stay the same.

It was probably the same 2000 years ago on that amazing day of Pentecost. Groups of people were gathered, just like us. They all came from different places, speaking different languages. Scripture tells us that:

"staying in Jerusalem were God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven." (Acts2:5)

They were believers, but they were content to stay in their own little groups, without reaching out to others. When suddenly something happened to change everything!

It begins with a mighty rushing wind sweeping through the crowd. Scripture describes it as a *“blowing violent wind”*(v2).

Now, I don't know if you were out in the wind storm that we had recently in Southern Ontario. Blair and I were driving in London, and the wind was so strong that you could see people finding it hard to walk along the streets – they were literally leaning into the wind. It was so strong that roofs were lifted off, shingles were flying. It was so strong, I refused to park my car under a street lamp because it was wobbling so precariously. Perhaps that gives us just a glimpse of what Luke means when he describes in the beginning of Acts, the mighty rushing wind on that Pentecost day. It blew in way to stir people into action; to wake them up; to blow away their cobwebs of compliancy.

Next, Luke describes the Holy Spirit as *“Tongues of fire that rested on each of them”* (v3). I have always found fire to be a very frightening image. I have a friend out in New Brunswick that fights forest fires, and she has described to me how just a small spark can turn into a raging fire ball. The heat, the smoke, the thickness of the air is just beyond our comprehension. It can consume a forest. Fires are frightening – and yet that is one of the images used to describe the Holy Spirit. Perhaps that is because Fire also has energy – and when we are filled with the Holy Spirit, we also have energy. Fires spread quickly – and when we are willing to tell others about our faith, and about what God and the Spirit is doing in our lives, then the Good News can spread quickly too.

Sometimes we may be more comfortable living our lives with faith like small glowing embers, but when we allow the wind of the Holy Spirit, it can be fanned into a living fire that can touch everyone around us with its healing energy.

And the third image we have of that first Pentecost is the way in which everyone stated speaking in different languages, and yet understood each other. Verse 4 tells us: *“All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues^[a] as the Spirit enabled them.”* You have to ask yourself – did everyone there really start speaking in the same language? Or was it something extraordinary happened that suddenly made them able to communicate in a way that they all understood?

A couple of years ago I was involved in the World Festival of Children’s Theatre – we had children from 45 countries come to Stratford to celebrate theatre and perform for each other over two weeks. Many of them did not speak English. But, it was fascinating to see how quickly they adapted and learned to play with each other using other ways of communicating – actions, smiles, laughter. There was quickly an understanding between them. It was a language of friendship and love. Could this be what was happening on the day of Pentecost? Did all the people from different cultures realize that they could communicate in ways other than speech? Did the power of God’s Spirit open their hearts and minds in such a freeing way, that linguistic boundaries between them were broken? We don’t know exactly what happened. But we do know that God’s Spirit was, and is, powerful.

God had most certainly foretold through the prophet Joel that the Holy Spirit would enable people to do remarkable things – they would be able to see visions, have dreams, understand prophecies. Joel prophesized that when the Holy Spirit was poured out, people would know the wonders of God.

And here we are, over 2000 years later with our safe lives and firm boundaries. Don’t we want to be as excited and changed today as those first Christians were. Don’t we want to be Pentecostal people? If we do, then we need to let the wind blow through us. We need to let the fire ignite us. We need to let go, and allow the Holy Spirit to move us. It might take us places that we are uncomfortable with. It might require us to speak to other people about

our faith - something that is difficult for many of us.

But, we cannot be open to the power and love of God's Holy Spirit, if our hearts and minds are reluctant to receive it.

We have Pentecostal helium filled balloons in decorating our sanctuary today. Just like us, those balloons can only fly free if we let go of them. We too, can only be free and allow the Holy Spirit to lead us, if we let go of what is holding us. I had thought that I would ask you to take a balloon, and we could all let them go into the community with a message of how the Spirit is moving at Knox attached. – But, then I thought about the environment and didn't want the balloons ending up having a negative impact in God's creation.

So, instead, I am inviting you to take a balloon – in the cards in your bulletin, write a message, or a prayer about the love of God, and the gift of the Holy Spirit – or write about what God's Spirit means to you, and how it is working in your life. I encourage you to later pass that card, with or without the balloon, and give it to someone else – a neighbor you've never spoken to, a merchant in our community, a colleague at work. Some of you may just want to pass on the card to a friend as an invitation to come to Knox. It will likely start a bit of a conversation, as the Spirit blows through the community.

Let's take some time to reflect and mediate on what the Spirit is doing in our lives – take the time to write on the card if you wish, as Nate quietly plays. Feel free to come and get a balloon too.

(music)

When we allow God's Holy Spirit to enter our lives, filling us with love and joy and peace, it can stir us up into something new and exciting – just like that first Pentecost. Amen.

Let us Pray:

**Naming the nameless Spirit of unity,
Scanning the heavens for signs of Your care;
God of the ages, give us humility;
Guide us to mystical union in prayer.**

Holy Spirit, come to us.

Come to our leaders of government and those in authority.

Come to outreach workers in aid agencies.

Come to those who risk their lives to keep others safe.

Come to all who are injured, misplaced, or grieving in the Israel and Palestine conflict.

Come to the hungry, the poor and the stateless.

Come to those who have no voice

Come to those whose voices speak up for justice.

Holy Spirit, we come to You in prayer – **Stir us into action**

Holy Spirit, come to us.

Come to bring healing to the sick and to all who are anxious

Come to bring peace to minds that are confused or frightened

Come to give doctors, nurses and those in caring professions

Come to bring courage to those nearing the end of life

Come to bring comfort to all who are bereaved

Come to bring compassion for us to reach out to those in need

Holy Spirit, we come to You in prayer – **Stir us into action**

Holy Spirit come to us.

Come to our families and friends we hold in our hearts this day

Come to your people gathered to worship in this place

Come to give new life to your Church

Come to be the fire that ignites us with energy

Come to be the wind that blows us out of complacency.

Come, Holy Spirit come to us.

Holy Spirit, we come to You in prayer – **Stir us into action AMEN.**