

If You Want to Fly a Kite, You Have to Catch Wind

Acts 2: 1-21

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First Federated Church

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(SERMON NOTES)

The key to flying a kite is “catching” the wind.

The first time I remember flying a kite was in the back yard of 6016 W. Farmington Road.

My dad and I put it together—or actually he assembled it,
got an old bed sheet from my mother
and tore it into long strips for a tail.

We went into the back yard and between the three of us—
my father, my mother and myself—
we ran until it caught the wind and soared skyward.

I don’t know how much kite string we had;
it was probably a roll of 150 or 200 feet.

I’d stood in the backyard, though,
with almost the whole roll of string attached to a tiny dot in the
sky.

Eventually we brought the kite down
and put it away for another Sunday afternoon.

Later that night as I lay in bed about to drift off to sleep,
I would momentarily feel the tug of the kite string on my finger
or feel the brush of a breeze in my hair
and faintly smell the fresh smell of the wind.

Throughout Scripture the spiritual presence of God has been described as a wind.

The very first book of the Bible begins with the Spirit of God.

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters (of chaos). (Genesis 1:1, 2)

In the gospel of John when a Pharisee named Nicodemus came to Jesus at night and they talked about God and who He—Jesus—is, Jesus compared the activity of God to the wind.

The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit." (John 3:8)

Today's lesson on this Pentecost Sunday is insightful in helping us "catch" the wind.

It begins by pointing to the importance of the community of faith.

Last Sunday at our 4 o'clock service we looked at the events immediately preceding our lesson. Before Jesus ascended into heaven he appeared to the gathered disciples one last time. He gives them a great commission.

They will be his witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and to the very ends of the earth.

But, he told them, they are to go to Jerusalem and wait for the Holy Spirit
for this Spirit would give them the power to do the things that He
called them to do,
to be witnesses.

They went back to Jerusalem and they waited.

And then, one morning as they were gathered together they heard a noise like a violent wind.

It filled the whole house.

They saw what appeared to be little tongues of flame dancing over each others' heads
and they were filled with the power of the Holy Spirit.

The disciples were all "together in one place."

Peter wasn't in Capernaum,

John wasn't in Nazareth,

James wasn't by the Sea of Galilee,

Andrew wasn't in Cana.

The disciples weren't scattered across the
land.

They were together.

The Spirit of God is a Spirit of Community.

Wherever two or three are gathered in my name, I will be in their midst, Jesus promised.
(Matthew 18:20)

Have you ever noticed how much more creative groups of people are than individuals?

Trying to work with committees can be maddening (*Tell me about it!*).

It may seem like we can get things done faster by ourselves
and often, we can.

But if you have you ever been with a group of people when everything is clicking,
when one person's idea feeds off of another's
and there is this inexplicable excitement in the air,
it's thrilling.
It's exhilarating.

Psychologists call that "synergy";
when the sum of the whole is greater than the individual parts.
Theologians call it the work of the Spirit.

So, Pentecost reminds us that if we want to catch the Spirit of God,
we need to be in a community of faith.
It all begins with the community.

I'm not sure we realize how counter-cultural the idea of community is in today's
individualistic society.

Years ago, before he was a United States Senator, James Webb wrote a "My Turn" piece
for Newsweek magazine.

It was the night after his daughter Amy had left for college.
Sitting in her bedroom he reflected upon the legacy that he and
his generation was leaving their children.
He was sad.

He wrote:

"It occurred to me, sitting in her bedroom, that the incubator had hatched and that
I had just delivered an adult into the world as surely as her mother had delivered an infant
18 years before. These childhood years have forged her view of the world, but like so
many of her compatriots, her life echoed with the turmoil of her elders.

"Amy grew up listening to the disagreements of her parents, both before and after
their divorce. She learned what it meant to be a 'latchkey kid,' cared for by phone. She
heard those who celebrated the drug culture tell her 'just say no' at about the same time
that high-school dealers started wearing beepers to class. ...

"Mine has not been a generation that offered its children certainties. We have
treated them to endless argument instead. Throughout her young life, my daughter has
been treated to a view that government is corrupt and unfair; this was fed by continuous
debates over civil rights, the Vietnam War, Watergate and the Iran-contra affair. She has
also watched the nation blunder about in its role a world leader, jerked this way and that

on foreign-policy issues and by leaders who appear to be selling her future to foreign investors instead of calling on citizens to regain the self-discipline that made us great.

“I fear that the greatest legacy of the baby-boom generation will be that although it asked all the right questions, in the early years of its adulthood, it resolved nothing. Raised by parents whose sacrifices during the Great Depression and World War II purchased for us the luxury of being able to question, we all understood the standards from which some of us were choosing to deviate. But lacking unity, riven by disagreement on every major issue and most minor ones, we have, perhaps unwittingly encouraged our children to believe that there are not touchstones, no true answers, no commitments worthy of sacrifice. Our children have been treated to grand debate and in many cases have grown up under the false illusion that there are no firm principles. That for every cause there is a countercause. For every reason to fight there is a reason to run. For every yin there is a yang.” (November 7, 1988)

In the 1987 movie “Wall Street”

Gordon Gekko captured the spirit of a decade
if not a generation.
“Greed in good,” he said.

I at times wonder if the generation that came of age in the 1980’s and ’90’s,
starting families,
buying homes,
didn’t turn selfishness and greed into a virtue.

We seldom know our neighbors.
We become more and more isolated,
more and more self-contained.

In our isolation we become more and more inward focused.
“Me” and “Mine” have supplanted “We” and “Ours.”
This mindset has made us more self-centered and jealous of
what others have
or may want from us.

We think that the “pie of life” is limited.

I don’t think that that is what the gospel teaches.
There is enough for everyone’s need,
but not everyone’s greed.

The English poet and cleric John Donne had it right.

No man is an island, entire of itself
Every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main
If a clod be washed away by the sea,

Europe is the less, as well as if a promontory were,
 As well as if a manor of thy friends or of thine own were,
 Any man's death diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind
 And therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls
 It tolls for thee.

Pentecost reminds us that you catch the Spirit of God when you are in community.

Secondly, our lesson reminds us of the necessity to communicate in ways that people can understand.

See if you know the answer to these questions.

What do you call a person who speaks three languages? Trilingual.

What do you call a person who speaks two languages?
 Bilingual.

What do you call a person who speaks only one
 language? An American.

By the way, according to the joke,
 I'm a true American.

In high school my foreign language was Latin,
 and you know what Latin students say about the
 language, don't you?
 "Latin killed the Romans and it's close to killing
 me!"

When the disciples were touched by Holy Spirit they intentionally reached out to people
 who were not like them.

In Jerusalem there were Parthians,
 Medes,
 Elamites,
 Romans,
 Cretans,
 Arabs
 and others.

The disciples spoke to them in their own language,
 in tongues
 or ways
 that they could understand.

The text reminds us that we are not to expect people to be like us in order to hear our
 proclamation of the Good News of God's love in Jesus Christ.

It puts the burden of understanding upon us.
 It puts the burden of proclamation upon us.
 It says that we are to speak like *them*.
 We are to use all of the means of communication
 available to us.

Educators tell us that each one of us may have a slightly different way of learning.
 Some people are tactile—"hands on" learners.
 Some are listeners.
 Some are writers.
 Some are visual.

Some have to repeat a thing over and over and over and over again ad nauseam.

What all of this means is that we need to be flexible in how we present the story of God's saving love.

I think that next Sunday is going to be fun.
 The youth of our church are going to help lead our worship service.

In talking with our Director of Youth Ministries Amy O'Brien I found out that our Call to Worship will be excitingly creative.

It makes me smile just thinking about it.
 Our youth are going to show us how young people think.

As I alluded to earlier,
 our children and grandchildren have had different experiences than
 many of us have had.
 They see the world a bit differently.
 They relate to one another differently.
 And different is not bad.
 It is just different.

Being open to speaking in other "languages",
 as the Spirit gives us the ability,
 leads us to our lesson's third insight.

We need to have courage.

Our text says that some of the residents of Jerusalem made fun of the disciples and dismissed them being drunk.

I recently read of a group of students at a Lutheran college who had special tee-shirts made for their 9 o'clock class.

The shirts simply said, “Acts 2:15.”

Most people don’t know their Bible well enough to know that Acts 2:15 says, but if you look it up—it is a part of today’s lesson—you will discover that it reads,

“Indeed, these are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only nine o’clock in the morning.”

Peter faced the disciples’ detractors and told them that the disciples were not drunk—for it was only 9 o’clock in the morning.

He told the scoffers that what they were mocking was the fulfillment of the ancient prophecy of Joel:

In the last days it will be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh. (16-17)

I think that courage is where many of us stumble.

Last Sunday evening I shared a time when I stumbled with the little glass bead of baptism. We distributed them on the second Sunday of this calendar year at the close of worship. If you were there you may remember that each worshipper was invited to dip their hand into a shallow bowl of water in order to pick up one of the clear glass beads. It was to be a reminder of their baptism. I kept mine in my coin purse. A few years ago in a coffee shop that I went to every morning in Burlington I was paying for my coffee when an attorney behind me asked about the glass bead.

I knew that he was Jewish and not wanting to possibly offend him I sloughed it off as a “keepsake.”

No sooner had I walked out of the coffee shop then I knew exactly what Peter must have felt like when he heard the cock crow.

How could I have offended if I merely told the attorney that it was a reminder of my baptism as a child and God and a disciple of Christ?

Thank God that the resurrected Lord appeared to Peter on the shore of Galilee in the 20th chapter of John’s gospel. In their encounter Peter was redeemed from his cowardice.

We don’t need to engage in philosophical debates with agnostics
or refute the best-selling books of neo-atheists.

We simply need to show a little courage
and point to what God is doing in our own life
and in this world around us.

When estranged family members reconcile; that's a God-moment.
 When an unexpected healing occurs; that's a God moment.
 When warring factions make peace, that's a God-moment.

Community, communication and courage.

All three of those attributes are witnessed to on this Pentecost and Mother's Day Sunday.

Today is an interesting intersection between the secular and the holy.
 Mother's Day will not occur on Pentecost Sunday again until the year
 2035.

I will not be here then.

I do not know how well you know the history of Mother's Day,
 but it was originally this day was called "Mothers' Work Days."
 "Mothers", by the way, was plural.

It began in 1858 in a small town in what is now West Virginia.

A school teacher named Anna Reeves Jarvis began a campaign to improve the sanitation
 conditions of her poor Appalachian community.

She focused on mothers because she thought that they disproportionately bore the weight
 of poverty.

During the Civil War she expanded the focus of the day to include working for better
 sanitary conditions on both sides of the conflict
 and at the War's end;
 she worked on behalf of reconciliation.

Anna Reeves Jarvis' daughter,
 also named Anna,
 lobbied for the establishment of an official holiday honoring
 mothers.

She thought that sons and daughters could,
 for one day,
 do the chores that mothers ordinarily did.

She also thought that children could write their mothers a simple note or letter.
 It would be a simple day in keeping the spirit of her mother.

Within in 50 years, though, she protested what she perceived to be the privatization and
 commercialization of the holiday.

As a matter of fact, before her death in 1948 she started a petition
 trying to repeal the holiday.

What began as an expression of social concern and compassion morphed into a celebration of individual motherhood.

On this day when the secular and the holy once again overlap,
 when we mark the 150th anniversary of Mother's Day *and* Pentecost
 we would do well to recall not only the origins of Mother's Day
 but the spirit of the early Church that had been touched
 by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Empowered by the Spirit at Pentecost we read in Acts 4 of the embodiment of
 community, communication and courage.

"There was not a needy person," the writer of Luke-Acts says, *"among them, for as many as owned lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold. They laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need. (Vs. 34-35)*

When the Holy Spirit came upon the early believers
 and formed them into a community of faith
 it inspired them to care for each other with a selflessness that is
 hard to imagine.

It was *that* Spirit of God that stirred the heart of Anna Reeves Jarvis to first fight against
 poverty
 and then to fight *for* the reconciliation of warring sides.

When we open ourselves to catch the wind of the Holy Spirit
 we discover that it powerfully rushes into our lives
 and our faith community.
 It transforms believers
 into disciples
 and disciples
 into a church.

To God be the glory. Amen.

(Credit goes to the Rev. Kristine A. Haig for insights on the history and meaning of
 Mother's Day.)