

Listen to the Wind

Nashville UCC, June 9 (Pentecost), 2019

It is no accident that the wind of the Spirit shows up in both the first chapter of Genesis (1:1-4) and the second chapter of Acts (2:1-4). Both of them, after all, are creation stories! When we ask, "Where did the cosmos come from?" scripture replies, "Why, it happened through the Spirit of God!" And when we ask, "Where did the Church come from?" scripture has the same answer: "It happened through the Spirit of God, too!" A powerful wind, one hovering over the primeval abyss, and another filling the room where Jesus' disciples had gathered: that's the Spirit at work! But the wind of the Spirit isn't destructive like the tornados that tore through west-central Ohio on Memorial Day. The wind of the Spirit is creative, bringing about new things that only existed in the mind of God before the Spirit blew them into existence!

We never know where that Spirit will show up next. And when the wind of the Spirit blows, we never know exactly what will appear because of it! Long ago, Isaiah reminded us that God says: "Look, I'm doing something new! It's springing up right now; don't you see it? I am making a way in the desert and streams in the wasteland!" The Spirit makes new things happen that we believe to be impossible! That wind was the same one that blew on the Red Sea while the Israelites huddled on the shore waiting for Pharaoh's army to massacre them, splitting the sea apart and allowing the Israelites to escape through the very heart of its waters. Impossible? Not for the wind of the Spirit!

That wind has been blowing ever since creation. We may not be able to see it, but we can surely see what it does! The wind of the Spirit blew through our country, and African-Americans were freed from the evils of segregation and granted civil rights. The wind of the Spirit blew in Germany, and the Berlin wall came tumbling down like the walls of Jericho. The wind of the Spirit blew in South Africa, and the apartheid there that had divided black and white for so long was discarded like so much trash. Oh, that wind is powerful, indeed, and does things that we cannot even imagine!

We need that wind of the Spirit to blow through our lives again today with its renewing power! Many of you remember the 1960's with its protests and its sit-ins and its flower children. I remember it very well, because I grew up in those turbulent days. One of the most popular songs of that era was the song "Blowing in the Wind," written by Bob Dylan and recorded by Peter, Paul and Mary. The lyrics are a series of questions that were on our minds back in those days. How many times must the cannonballs fly before they're forever banned? How many deaths will it take till we know that too many people have died? How many times can a man turn his head and pretend that he just doesn't see?

They're questions that we still ask ourselves today when we see horrifying images of famine and suffering and war on the evening news. "When will it all end?" we wonder. When will we take steps to stop the shooters who massacre our children as they sit in their schoolrooms? When will we stop poisoning the earth with pesticides and killing its creatures for our amusement? When will people stop grabbing for power and start working together for the good of everyone? We don't have the answers; and it doesn't seem likely that we'll have them any time soon.

But the refrain of this song offers something that we Christians can hang on to as we celebrate Pentecost: "The answer, my friend, is blowing in the wind." All the answers that we crave are

blowing in the wind of the Spirit of God! That Spirit blows when we are helpless, hopeless, and don't know what to do next; and that certainly seems to be our situation today. But when the wind of the Spirit blows, impossible things can happen! "How many years can a mountain exist before it is washed to the sea?" One day, the mountain of racism, sexism, and injustice will be washed away by the living water of God's justice. "How many years can some people exist before they're allowed to be free?" One day, the people who are oppressed by unjust political and economic systems will be freed by the wind of God's Spirit. "How many ears must one man have before he can hear people cry?" One day, all of us will have our ears opened to the cries of our fellow human beings and the creation around us, and we will rise up and demand that the world be set right!

When will that be? "The answer, my friend, is blowing in the wind." When our powerful, creative God blows the wind of the Spirit through us once again, it will blow down the barriers of hatred that divide us, blow away the dusty cobwebs of indifference to the suffering of others, and blow through our refusal to consider new answers to old questions. And then, my friends, we will know the answers that are now only blowing in the wind.