



COMMUNITY
PRESBYTERIAN
CHURCH

MINISTER
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Pentecost

Acts 2:1-11

Winds of Change

Intro: Our New Testament Lesson is the story of Pentecost from Acts.

Ten years ago, I turned thirty. (I'll let you do the math for a moment.) This past Friday many of you gathered in fellowship hall to help me celebrate that tenth anniversary. Thank you for the fun, the cards, and for the gifts. (I have enough bran flakes to share). Ten years ago my life changed in some wonderful ways. I became a dad for the first time. I was ordained. And it was ten years ago I graduated from seminary. I'd like to share with you a little of that particular day. This was a beautiful clear day, much too hot to be wearing our black robes. Writer and comedian, Dave Barry gave the commencement address, which you can imagine was stayed and somber. There were all kinds of emotions that day as teachers and students said farewell and God bless.

The part I remember most about that day came right after graduation. When we were leaving the campus grounds for the last time, Monica took the car keys from me and said "get in". This doesn't happen very often so I said the first thing I could think of which was "OK." We headed north of San Francisco, through Napa and came to a deserted looking airport. I saw a few small Cessnas that look like flying work horses, and then I saw a few high performance sailplanes, which are huge beautiful long winged gliders, and I began to get an idea. I had learned to fly sailplanes years before, but had not had the chance to be up in one for years. And once I had mentioned a desire to fly in an aerobatic sail plane. Monica remembered.

This was my chance. We got out of the car, and the people there knew we were coming. I met a sun-glassed instructor who asked me if I had eaten too much cake or anything like that at graduation. I said no. He then handed me a parachute, showed me how to use it, Monica gave me a kiss, and we got into this sailplane. I looked with wonder at the fifty foot wingspan. "Let see where the wind will take us!" he said as we nested ourselves in our tiny little seats and pulled the canopy down over our heads.

(Bring out model) Now a sailplane on the ground can't do a thing by itself. A tow plane is required to get aloft. And then it is the wind that creates lift and enables one to soar. Our plane was connected by a long rope to a tow plane and the ground crew and I communicated using hand signal to hook the plane up. Open / shut. The plane starts up and away we go down the runway. While in tow, the whole thing is to stay in the slipstream of the towplane. There is one spot where the sail plane is best sheltered from the buffeting wind of the prop blast. So the whole trick is to stay confined in this narrow little box of airspace behind the plane. That's good, that is what you are taught to do. No original thinking is required here, just do as the towplane does. It is what you are supposed to do in order to most quickly get to altitude. We follow the tow plane for quite a while. All the time I am loving the view

and thrilling to be in the air.

Then as we reach the desired altitude, I reach for the big red knob that says "release" and pull. Suddenly we are free and on our own. At the point of release there is an established pattern of the towplane banking left and the sailplane banking right. We do so and we are free. All that is heard is the rush of the wind over the wings. Just as I'm enjoying the moment. Everything changes. We head straight up and over. And in seconds we are flying upside down. And we stay that way for a while. Let me tell you the world looks different from this perspective. I'm thinking "wait a minute..."

Non-powered airplanes are not supposed to do this. I may have said something like that and my instructor proceeds to show me what else I thought could not be done. We did loops, rolls, wingovers. As we came in for a landing, I was feeling a little scrambled, to say the least, but I had enough of my wits about me to know we were going too fast and at a 45 degree angle to the runway. In a sailplane you only get one shot at a landing. Oh NO! were my last words as the plane pitched toward the ground and then suddenly soared up once more, with a graceful turn and a perfect alignment to the runway. We landed on the numbers and stopped right where we had taken off. I got up, staggered a little, but never have I been more ecstatic, and looked back, and thought "All that with only the

power of the wind.”

Our story of Pentecost starts out easily enough; we read that a group of people are praying. A nice quiet worship service. Even Presbyterians would be comfortable in that little room filled with people praying together. It was dignified, respectful. People doing what Jesus told them to do.

But then the wind blows. No little breezes this Pentecost morning. Big gusts of mighty wind. And Fire. Tongues of fire sitting on everyone’s shoulder. And people blathering about, speaking in different languages all at the same time?

What would it have been like that morning? What would you think? So much noise. So much confusion. No wonder people thought they were all drunk. No wonder the mainline Church has tucked this passage of Scripture up into our ecclesiastical attic. We read it because it is Scripture. We color the paraments red just one day a year. We celebrate just a little bit and call this day the birthday of the Church. But we keep it under control. Not too much confusion. If we’re honest about it, this Scripture lesson about the coming of God’s Holy Spirit onto all God’s people is an embarrassment to us.

It’s so noisy and confusing. People are being weird. In church. In church, of all places. The church where we want to keep things quiet. The church where we want to keep things the same. Especially when nothing is ever the same in our

society and our environment anymore. This Holy Spirit might just embarrass a church to death.

But think about it. The wind blows. A church is born. The wind blows. People are forever changed. The story of Pentecost begins with the story of wind. Nothing seen, but certainly noticed. Nothing said at first, but something is definitely heard. After the wind comes, there is fire. Fire that changes everything it touches. It is a day that from outside appearances, it makes no sense. But for those who hear the Good news in their own language, for those who could speak and be understood by someone else, for those who knew about God’s love and call to community, this was a new day. For them the winds of change were blowing and Church was about to begin.

Pentecost is the birthday of the church the beginning of the first church service. This was not a quite sleepy little service where people might let the spirit pass them by. Look at the community gathered. Look at who the Spirit chose to infuse with energy imagination and love. It was Peter the one who had denied Jesus three times, it was the disciples who had followed him for so long and still could not get it right or even close. They had been leading incremental lives following Jesus with hesitations and reservations, wanting to encounter Jesus only on their terms. Then the wind blows them off their feet

and they are standing in a different place. Able to do things and say things they hadn’t before. They were pretty excited about what God was doing through them. Jesus had said before his death you will do even greater works than I have. Something was happening and they were pretty excited.

It is in community of people that expect God to act that the spirit comes. Community Presbyterian is a community of people expecting the spirit to act. Scripture shows us of a time when church was about to start in a wonderful new way. When people speak of their lives with honesty and trust that the spirit is present, winds of changes are blowing. We don’t where the spirit may lead us, but it is good and it is of God. The Good news happens when we hear each other and act in ways that affirms God’s merciful loving way. It starts with wind and moves to words.

And God’s word was now heard in many languages. And not so much that it was heard, but it was understood. People got it; they understood what God’s love for us through Jesus was all about. And they were excited.

For anyone, expecting and wanting everything to be the same, Pentecost seems pretty chaotic. But read on in Acts and we’ll see what God is doing. The holy wind blows. The flames of holy passion ignite the people of God. Ordinary people, people like you and

me. They begin to do amazing things. This is and will be our story too.

Amen.