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Can You Feel the Breeze? – Acts 2:1-21

I was in a New Mexico hotel room Thursday night, waiting to pick up my daughter Sadie the next morning. The front desk staff, who knew me by name (never a good thing in a hotel, but it was the same one we stayed in two weeks ago on our last visit), were gracious and thoughtful, knew I'd just driven five hundred miles (the last part through a huge thunderstorm) and was in need of peace and sleep, so they put me in a quiet, isolated corner room.

Which would have been just wonderful, had it not been for the fact that a violent wind was blowing past that corner, magnified by a sort of wind-tunnel effect, and a large tree was just outside. Even if I hadn't already been thinking of the mighty winds of Pentecost, the whistling, screaming, whooshing, and pounding would have called it to mind. The British military have a phrase for a place that's taking a lot of enemy fire in combat – they call it a “windy corner” – and I couldn't help thinking about that, too.

If I'd been actually out in that wind, it would have buffeted me terribly. As it was, it just blew by.

Too often, the winds of Pentecost, the wind of the Holy Spirit, just blow by us.

Wind is so – so hard to get your hands on. It can literally blow you away, it can mess up your hair or steal your hat; it can hurt. It can also cool you, soothe you, calm you. Ever snuggled up by a fire while the wind blew outside? Savored a warm breeze on your cheek?

But helpful or harmful, you can't grab the wind or air and hold on to it. Jesus said, "the wind blows where it will," and it does. Sometimes we want a breeze, sometimes we don't; we can direct it or deflect it to some extent, but the wind is always beyond our grasp. From a flat calm to a tornado or hurricane, the wind is many things to many people (sometimes it blows in trouble, sometimes good things), but it's never at our beck and call, only God's.

As Sadie and I were driving back Friday, I saw just outside Albuquerque on I-25 something I hadn't thought of in years. Headed north was a bookmobile.

Anyone remember those? They were so wonderful, taking knowledge and unimagined worlds in the form of books out into remote areas that didn't have libraries, bookstores, or much of anything except a few people.

What you may not remember is that they were sometimes controversial. You see, the books they carried were full of ideas, and

sometimes people don't like ideas, particularly if they challenge what you already know. So some people in some places tried to keep the bookmobiles away, or at least try to restrict what books they might carry, because we don't want things to change – they're just fine the way they are.

We are either privileged or cursed to be living in a time of enormous turbulence. The winds of change are howling around us, and there's plenty to be excited about, scared about, angry about everywhere you look. We're in a "windy corner," ourselves.

But then there's this story of the coming of the Holy Spirit, birthing the Church, the bride of Christ. The sound of a violent wind as the Spirit fills the disciples with strange knowledge – the ability to praise God in languages they didn't know. And it fills Peter with the power to preach as no one has ever done. Three thousand became followers of Jesus Christ that day the winds of Heaven, the wind of the Spirit, blew through Jerusalem.

But it was new, too, and there were those who looked at all this fuss as a challenge to the way things were, a challenge to what they knew, and they fought it. They saw this Jesus-stuff as the end of the world it was, and they were right.

The world changed. And it will continue to change, is changing now. So what are we to make of what's going on around us today – not

just world events, but in the Christian Church, in our own church, in our experience?

Remember, the word for Spirit and breath and wind are the same in Hebrew and Greek. Now, remember what happened in Genesis, the beginning of the Bible. God makes a human being from the fertile soil of the earth. But it isn't until God breathes into that thing that it becomes alive. The word for that breath is the same as the word for wind or spirit.

We talk about the breath of life, the breath of God, use all kinds of words to describe the spirit, the soul, the stuff that God put into that first human, the stuff that is part of us.

That breath of God that inspired, inspirited, brought life to that human being, is the same breath, the same wind that blew at Pentecost. The difference is, in Genesis God breathed life into one creature, breathed the spirit spark into him. In Jerusalem on this day, fifty days after Easter, God breathed life into his new creation, the church, and still breathes life into it (meaning us) today.

It's no easier to understand or grasp than it was then. The wind of the Spirit, the divine life that is in each of us, is no easier to hold and analyze, and no more possible to control than the wind. Witness the way that the Church has been blown about over the centuries, and is being buffeted right now!

But the Spirit is at work. Not just in the big things, but in the smallest as well – whether it’s a tremendous wind or a light breeze.

I once served a congregation which had a new sanctuary, dedicated just weeks before I arrived as an interim. Like ours, here, it had lots of air conditioning vents – you know, those things people are always complaining about.

The Pentecost I was there, the people of the church got up on ladders the week before Pentecost Sunday and put orange, red, and yellow crepe ribbons all over the ceiling and the light fixtures, and sure enough, when we all sat quietly, you could hear the rustle of the paper as the air played with it.

I don’t want to sound sacrilegious, but the Spirit plays with us, too. And if you listen very, very carefully, you can hear it move. But more importantly, you can feel it.

Right now, I believe we are living in one of the most exciting times that Christianity has ever witnessed.

The church was born and the world changed as a result of that day in Jerusalem, and the power of the Spirit and the message and the work of those who could feel the breeze of the Spirit playing with their lives made other lives change.

Every time we breathe in, we breathe in the very wind of God, God's own creation. We breathe it in, and we breathe it out. We sigh – some of you have noticed that I sigh a bit too often – but taking a nice, deep breath and letting it go is calming. Even more so when we realize we are breathing in God's life with each and every breath.

And the church breathes along with us. In and out; receiving what we need and exhaling what we do not. My prayer for you is that as you breathe, you will recall the winds that brought the Spirit, which brought the speech, which brought the praises of God and Peter's sermon, which brought the church and the spread of salvation and life and God's love.

We tend to seek God in the past or in what may come in the future. God is certainly in the past; we can see that, Scripture and those who have gone before us bear witness to that. God is also in the future; we have God's promises. But God, the God of Pentecost, of change and the Spirit – even if we cannot grasp and hold it – is today.

Lord, send forth your Spirit, and we shall be created, and you will renew the face of the earth.