

Acts 2:1-21  
May 15, 2016

“Pentecost”

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Rev. Jim McLean is a colleague and friend from my days as a Pastor in Illinois. Two things you need to know about Jim. He was cheap, as in he would not even tip his daughter when she waited on him at the Chinese restaurant in town. And... Jim LOVED to sail.

Each late spring and late fall, Jim would rent a sailboat for a week. But because he was thrifty, he waited until the main sailing season had ended. This meant discount rates, but also meant the weather was usually rainy and cold. Jim invited all of us in the local clergy group to come along, we always wondered was it for companionship, or to get us to share the rental cost, probably both. And when we were able to stay overnight on the boat it meant anchoring in a safe cove.

When you combined his frugality with his being sort of a mystic, it meant Jim would wake early in the morning. And after coffee he wanted to “Sail” out of the cove, no auxiliary motor for him. “Auxiliary” is what dedicated sailors call the small power motor provided on the sailboat, one purpose being to get out of the cove and into the wind so you can get sailing. But Jim wanted to sail out of the cove. Of course in this well protected cove surrounded on three sides by a canopy of trees and bushes, there was hardly a whiff of airflow.

It could take an hour or more to “Sail” out of the cove. I remember our friend Ed one morning as we slowly drifted out of the cove, he said, “This too is sailing,” and we all broke into gut wrenching laughter, even Jim.

For the last 7 weeks Jesus’ followers have been paralyzed by the question of, “What to do next.” And into their gathering blows the Holy Spirit, what one colleague likes to call, “The Present Tense of God.” Into this gathering that was shaping up to be either a sentimental reunion or a gloomy committee meeting, suddenly these do nothing followers are empowered, renewed. Able to get out there and do something. Peter, who had denied knowing Jesus 3 times, is on his feet quoting the Old Testament Book of Joel: “I will out my Spirit upon all flesh...” And all those who had been inwardly focused, fearful, behind closed doors, are ready to go out empowered and energized.

I started with the story about Sailing because the word for “Spirit” in both Hebrew and Greek, is literally, “wind.” We all know times when there is no wind in the church, no wind in our faith, no wind in our meetings, no wind in our work, and no wind in our journey. We all know what it is like to sail out of a cove wondering if we are moving at all.

The force of this story is clear: The energy which enables us to do what we are called to do, to do what we need to do, the lasting energy that renews and empowers is not of our own creation. It is not just about our will power, or our smarts, or our cleverness, it’s not only our

strategies or great ideas. The energy we long for, the wind in our sails comes from The Holy Spirit which is the power of God present to us in every time and place.

In sailing with Jim there was always that moment. We may have spent more than an hour drifting out of the cove at a pace we could have out-paddled, but... there was always that instant when the jib sail caught, and the main sail filled, the boat turned and heeled to one side and we were suddenly skimming down the lake full charge ahead. Wind in our face, sails full, and our hearts nestled excitedly up in the bottom of our throats!

On Pentecost the birth of the church happened when God's Spirit broke into that confused, stagnant gathering. It provided an outpouring which is still available today. It opened hearts with the ability to understand those very different from ourselves. And it gave each one the patience to listen, really listen, it empowered Peter with the perfect words for his spontaneous sermon on dreaming dreams, and seeing visions.

But before Peter's sermon we might wonder what message did the spirit help them to understand through wind and flame? What good news was so convincing? Was it the audacity to believe we are never alone? Was it the encouragement to practice kindness in a world becoming ever cruel? Was it the profound truth of God's unconditional love poured out upon everyone without merit? Was it the message that a barrier breaking God is present to help break down walls we cannot overcome? Was the message reminding us to be humble in a world becoming more self-centered?

What message snapped the crowd out of their "do it our own way" delirium? We all know how our own plans can go awry. My colleague Dr. Michael Lindvall at Brick Church Presbyterian says, "We fight a war for peace and find ourselves in another war. Our plans for social betterment make somethings better and somethings worse. We finally buy the place we dreamed of and find ourselves still not perfectly happy. We succeed beyond our expectations only to discover the competition has succeeded even more successfully."

We believe we can make the world, our life, our day, our workplace in our own image! But Pentecost reminds us...

There comes a time in life when we need to flip our auxiliary motors off, set the sails, and wait for God's Spirit to move us. We are not mere bystanders though, we have the responsibility to continue to nurture our relationship with God and with each other. But the saving of the world and of our life, is not ultimately up to us; we are partners, we are the hands and feet of God's living, loving, blowing, flaming Spirit. We may drift at a hardly measurable pace for a time. But when the Spirit comes, the jib sail will snap into place, the mainsail will fill, and God's Spirit will power us like nothing else ever could. When the Holy Spirit fills our sails we can dance and skim right over the waves and become what we were always meant to be.

Amen

