

A Windy Sunday

Acts 2:1-21

A few weeks ago, we went to Atlantic Beach for a few days and we had a variety of weather. The first day, was very windy and cold. The second day was breezy, but not windy, and warmer. The day we left, it was calm and almost hot. Words like windy, breezy, and calm are descriptions we use to describe the wind.

My descriptions of the weather could mean many different things to different people. Words like windy, breezy, and calm are hard to quantify.¹ Our text today in verse 2 says, “And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind...” I’m guessing that a violent wind means it wasn’t calm but was this breezy wind or windy wind? You see the dilemma don’t you?

When I moved here from the Midwest, I had to make a wind adjustment. In the Midwest, the wind blows all the time. Here, it’s not as frequent and North Carolina definitions of a windy day are often described as calm days in the Midwest. Some of you right now are perhaps thinking about another kind of wind – a windy preacher who doesn’t seem to be making any sense. So what’s the point in this wind talk?

This is Pentecost Sunday. It’s the Sunday when we focus our worship on the work of the Holy Spirit. The Bible uses wind language to talk about the Holy Spirit’s work in our lives. The Greek word used for wind here in Acts 2:2 is πνοῆς² (pno-ays) and this word is a cousin to the Hebrew word רוּחַ (ruah) of Ezekiel 37 and other Old Testament texts. In John 3:8 Jesus described the work of the Spirit in this way, “The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.” We hear this wind language used to describe the Spirit’s work and it’s obviously ambiguous.

What I want to do is address this question, “How do we know when the Holy Spirit is at work in our lives?”

So how do we know when the Spirit is at work in our lives? In 1964, Supreme Court Justice Potter Stewart was working on a very difficult issue – the definition of obscenity. About the best he could come up with was, “I know it when I see it.”³ Often this is about as close as we can come to describing the

¹ The scales used to measure and describe the wind at the ocean are described in great depth in “The Spirit Scale,” *Homiletics*, May 15, 2005, pp. 26-30. This sermon uses some of the information from that article, though seeks to make a different point.

² From Bibleworks 7: πνοῆς noun genitive feminine singular common from πνοή.

³ “The Spirit Scale,” *Homiletics*, May 15, 2005, p. 26.

Spirit's work in our lives. Church people will often describe the perplexing by saying, "It's the work of the Spirit." For example, we have a sense that we need to call someone who's been going through a rough time. Our call ends up being perfect timing and becomes a real turning point in that person's recovery. We have a deep conviction that someone we know needs to be prayed for and find out later this person was in the midst of a life-changing decision right at the moment we are praying. Is it a mere coincidence or the prompting of the Spirit? There are many experiences we can point to, and struggle to quantify, yet they seem beyond explanation. And the Church has often put the unexplainable and mystifying into the Holy Spirit's realm of operation.

I know this is even more vague than describing the wind so let me offer this extremely simplistic thought about a very complex issue. Question: How do we know when the Spirit is at work in our life? Answer: If you accomplish something you couldn't do on your own.

Ainslee has been at my folks for almost a week now. One thing she wanted to do was to go fishing with Grandpa. On Thursday they went fishing. I've fished before with Ainslee and as you can imagine, she needs a little help. She knows the worm goes on the hook, but she doesn't know how. She doesn't know how deep to fish, or what areas of water might have snags. She doesn't always know when to set the hook or keep letting the fish nibble. But my dad does. My dad helped her do something she couldn't do on her own and they caught fish and had a great time!⁴

When I think about the Spirit's work in my life, if it's something I couldn't do on my own, then I'm very likely to see this as the Spirit's work. If you look at all the lectionary texts for this week, each of them has this component. In our text today, the Spirit empowers people to speak in languages they have never learned and gives them boldness to do so publicly. In Romans 8, the Spirit helps believers to pray in ways they could not pray on their own. In John 15-16, Jesus says the Spirit will guide the disciples into all truth – truth they could not handle or deal with on their own. Bluntly stated, God has resources we don't. And God desperately wants to resource the Church to do "God things."

If my simplistic way of identifying the Spirit's presence is accurate, then it begs the question: What are we doing in our church and in our lives that goes beyond our own natural capacities? Where in your life and church is the supernatural unmistakably evident? Are these questions easy for you to answer?

The Church has always been called to exercise a radical faithfulness and obedience to God. We have always been called to attempt, follow, and proceed in ways that often make very little sense. We are to love those no one else

⁴ This emphasis is made in Rob Merola's article, "Living By the Word: Radical Reliance," in *The Christian Century*, May 30, 2006, p. 22.

wants to love. We are to pour resources and efforts into programs that never will turn a profit. We are embrace leaders in the church who may have little expertise beyond their passionate pursuit of God's heart. We are to believe God's Son was born in a miraculous way, lived a peasant's life, was crucified, but then rose from the dead. What are you doing in life that goes beyond your natural capabilities? The story of Pentecost is that today can be another windy Sunday. Now is the time for each of us to step forward and radically follow the leadings of the Spirit.

Amen.