

**SAN MARINO CONGREGATIONAL
UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST**

Reflections by Pastor Donald Shenk

(Delivered on Sunday, June 4, 2017)

Text: **Taken from Acts 2**

(Please note: For our scripture experience this Sunday, our liturgist Dave Van Horsen and Pastor Donald presented the following dramatic reading and then we sang Jim Manley's beautiful song, "Spirit, Spirit of Gentleness.")

Wind, fire, surprise, cacophony of languages, promises fulfilled, dreams, visions, gifts given and received, and most of all the Spirit—these are all parts of what make up the Pentecost experience, not only for the first-century church, but for us as well.

As we experience the Story of Pentecost anew this day, through a dramatic reading and a Spirit-filled song, let the rush of the mighty wind be felt, the flames be seen, and the visions and dreams happen as we celebrate the gift of the Spirit in our midst.

DAVE: When the holy day of Pentecost came 50 days after Passover, they were gathered together in one place.

Picture yourself among the disciples:

A sound roars from the sky without warning, the roar of a violent wind, and the whole house where you are gathered reverberates with the sound.

Then a flame appears, dividing into smaller flames and spreading from one person to the next. All the people present are filled with the Holy Spirit and begin speaking in languages they've never spoken, as the Spirit empowers them.

Because of the holy festival, there are devout Jews staying as pilgrims in Jerusalem from every nation under the sun. They hear the sound, and a crowd gathers. They are amazed because each of them can hear the group speaking in their native languages. They are shocked and amazed by this.

PASTOR: (Pilgrims):

Just a minute. Aren't all of these people Galileans? How in the world do we all hear our native languages being spoken? Look—there are Parthians here, and Medes, Elamites, Mesopotamians, and Judeans, residents of Cappadocia, Pontus, and Asia, Phrygians and Pamphylans, Egyptians and Libyans from Cyrene, Romans including both Jews by birth and converts, Cretans, and Arabs. We're each, in our own languages, hearing these people talk about God's powerful deeds.

DAVE: Their amazement becomes confusion as they wonder,

PASTOR (Pilgrims): What does this mean?

DAVE (Skeptics): It doesn't mean anything. They're all drunk on some fresh wine!

PASTOR: As the twelve stood together, Peter shouted to the crowd,

DAVE (Peter): Men of Judea and all who are staying here in Jerusalem, listen. I want you to understand: these people aren't drunk as you may think. Look, it's only nine o'clock in the morning! No, this isn't drunkenness; this is the fulfillment of the prophecy of Joel. Hear what God says!

PASTOR: Please rise and join us in singing, "Spirit, Spirit of Gentleness" as we hear the words of the prophet resounding in in song.

Reflections by Pastor Donald: **"Born on the Wind"**

I've always loved the wind, although I've also been very afraid of it.

Perhaps the fear came from those Sunday nights growing up when, once-a-year, The Wizard of Oz would come on TV and by some kiss of God would fall on a vespers Sunday when the evening church service was over early enough that we could get home in time to see it. Rare indeed.

I've seen Dorothy in her flying house dozens of times since, but that early black and white footage of screen doors being torn from their hinges by the ferocious wind and a freaky schoolmarm riding through the sky outside the window on her bicycle can still make my heart palpitate a bit.

Growing up in a house on a street called Hillcrest, where, from our hilltop perch, we could see a great swath of the Shenandoah Valley stretching out beneath us, I would pace from room to room during our regular and massive thunder storms, peering out the large rattling windows as the rain and wind whipped the trees into wicked frenzies, tearing off their leaves and hurling debris through the air. I was just sure that at any point a funnel cloud would form and come hurtling down the valley like some big bad ball thrown by the wind, taking out all the trees like so many bowling pins and sending our houses hurtling towards Oz! Strike!

Yeah, I had a pretty vivid imagination. Still do, fortunately or un...

But I didn't experience truly righteous wind until I moved to Los Angeles over 30 years ago. Nobody had bothered to tell me about that phenomena called the Santa Ana Winds before I moved here. You know what I'm talking about, of course - those wild winds that, as Robert Fovell, Professor of Atmospheric and Oceanic Sciences at UCLA, tells us, "start in the Great Basin of the western US, incorporating Nevada and part of Utah, as a cool or even cold wind." Then, as the air descends into Los Angeles, it is compressed, and its temperature rises, hurtling towards us at an incredible rate.

“If you take a piece of air located only a mile above your head, and brought it down to your feet,” the professor notes, “it would wind up 30 degrees Fahrenheit warmer than when it started. You don't need to change the altitude of air very much to alter its temperature significantly...

In many places,” he states, “the Santa Ana winds tend to behave like a mountain gap wind, increasing speed as the flow is channeled through passes and canyons...capable of producing very fast speeds.”

Well, well... thank you so much Dr. Donald, I hear you thinking, “but what the Fire does this have to do with the Holy Spirit and Pentecost?” Well, I'm so glad you're asking!

You may remember that I began these explorations by saying, “I've always LOVED the wind, AND have also been afraid by it.” And as I thought about it, that's pretty much exactly the way I feel about the Holy Spirit and the Feast of Pentecost - that fateful day when, “without warning,” The Message tell us, “there was a sound like a strong wind, gale force” that “filled the whole building” and “like a wildfire, the Holy Spirit spread through their ranks.”

I'm knocked out of my socks by this kind of wind. On the one hand, there's the wind I love - those winds that blow cool and strong, filling the sails of our lives with a power that moves us forward. A power we feel we can stand up to or at least within and, if we get a good foothold, can work with to steer ourselves where we think we want to go.

But then there's this Pentecost wind. This gale force that comes without warning and spreads fire through our ranks, burning down barriers of language and culture and sparking understanding amongst everyone gathered.

This kind of hot, fierce wind is unpredictable. It's out of our control. It takes us by surprise and leads us into places we've never been and experiences we've never encountered. It uproots old suppositions and sweeps clear the detritus that litters the forest floor of our lives.

To open ourselves to this kind of wind is unsettling and frightening AND...

so necessary in breaking open the old seed cones of belief and self-determination we've held onto so that the new seeds of faith and understanding our oneness might break out and burst forth and bring new life and new understanding to our lives and to the church.

I wonder where you might need the fierce hot winds of the Spirit to descend in your life. What new thing is about to happen for you? What do you envision for your life and for your church? What are your dreams? What will you prophesy? Where does God's Holy and righteous Spirit want to sweep into this place and into the very marrow of your life?

Writing in an ancient tome called "Readings in John's Gospel," William Temple seems to be speaking to our very present day when he states that, "the Greek word for spirit has the suggestion of breath or wind; [and that] the Hebrew word - Ruach - actually means the desert-wind, that powerful unseen force that sweeps across the face of the earth, none knows whence or whither."

Despite the archaic language, the general gist here is that the wind, the Spirit, is going to blow wherever it will. We can hear its voice, but we don't know when it will manifest or where it may be coming from or where it will go. "But" Mr. Temple writes, "you can feel its breath on your face IF, hearing it pass, you go out and stand in its course...Don't ask for credentials. Don't wait till you know the source of the wind before you let it refresh you, or its destination before you spread sail to it. It offers what you need; trust yourself to it."

When we truly allow the Spirit to blow through our lives and into our hearts, souls and minds, we open ourselves to a leading like no other.

"I cannot cause light;" Annie Dillard writes in her seminal book, "Pilgrim at Tinker Creek," "the most I can do is try to put myself in the path of its beam."

"It is possible, in deep space, to sail on solar wind. Light, be it particle or wave, has force: you rig a giant sail and go. The secret of seeing is to sail on solar wind. Hone and spread your spirit till you yourself are a sail, whetted, translucent, broadside to the merest puff."

"Wind, wind. A reflection on the Spirit"

By William Loader (Adapted)

Wind, wind,
you come from nothingness and go
to nothingness,
and when you are still,
there is nothing we see, nothing we hear,
and you surround us in our not seeing
and not knowing.

Wild, wild wind,
you whip the seas,

whirling great water spouts and fountains,
crashing the foamed edges of the shore,
sweeping the unsuspecting fisherman
from the slippery rocks,
terrifying force, uncontrollable,
beyond our power.

Wind, wind, wondrous wind,
hovering at the birth of creation,
whisking secretly among the wonders
of new life,
bearing the seed,
lifting high the heads of mighty trees,
swirling among the grasses, celebrating life.

Wind, wind, gentle wind,
wind of our breathing, our life, our hope,
renewing, refreshing,
sighing in our stress,
moaning in our pain,
still in our dying.

O wind, wind,
you breathed upon the clay
and there was life,
you danced down to the
forehead of a Galilean
and there was hope,
you shook the foundations of community
and there was Pentecost.

AMEN.