

## “Like A Tornado” Acts 2:1 -21

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“A violent wind.” It may be that the writer of Acts is speaking metaphorically since the word "spirit" in Greek is the same word as the word "wind." The writer of Acts may be saying that the spirit was present in a powerful way. But I like to visualize the special effects.

I like to think of the wind shaking paintings off the wall and slinging them to the floor. I like to think of the Apostle John's hair being blown by the powerful wind. I like to envision Simon Peter trying to keep his napkin on the table. I like to visualize all of this, even though John may have been bald and Simon Peter may have wiped his mouth on his sleeve. All we know is what scripture tells us: there was a violent wind.

But there's more: "Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them..." This is no run-of-the-mill Presbyterian worship service! And the disciples began to speak in other languages known by the people standing around them.

We know this because scripture says: "There were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in their native language."

It was real. It was life-changing. And it honored God.

Pentecost is a unique celebration, and different from the experience of the resurrection. You see, at Christ's resurrection, only people who already believed in Christ saw evidence of his resurrection. But on the day of Pentecost "devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem" (that is, non-Christians) heard the disciples each in their own native language.

Amazed and astonished, they asked, "Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? How is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language?" This is the church at its best -- cutting across the lines that separate people from one another.

It's what God intends the church to be--a fellowship that reaches out to all. The church was never intended to be for the cloistered elite. We are called to connect people--all people--to God.

The church at its best is a place where we reach out to the world rather than shut out the world while we prepare ourselves for heaven. Our calling is to reach out to the world. When the disciples bore witness to their faith, they spoke in languages that everyday people could understand. This was a sign to us--we are not the church turned inward on itself. We are the church reaching out to the world.

The church reached outward to the world and while they reached inward to one another. One of the most remarkable stories in literature is the story of the love for one another that enveloped the church at Pentecost. These early believers ate together, sang together, prayed together; looked after widows and orphans in their midst, together.

Most of the strength in their witness was how they lived out their love for one another. It's good to remind ourselves each year at Pentecost of the ties that bind the body of Christ together. Too often in churches we treat one another with malice and end up hurting one another sometimes even with good intent

Jesus said, "By this shall the world know that you are my disciples, that you love one another." The early church reached outward to the world and inward to one another.

And, of course, the church always reaches upward toward God. The Day of Pentecost was no mere sociological event. Something mysterious happened that day. The Spirit of the living God fell upon some ordinary men and women who did extraordinary things from that day forward.

They were people not much different from you and me, weren't well educated in a worldly sense. But they had studied under the greatest teacher of all. And now that he was physical gone, his Spirit led them to touch the lives of thousands of people.

I find that to be of great hope. The church uses human efforts. Our own church could not carry out our mission without the work of many of you who give sacrificially. Still, it's comforting to know that the church is ultimately not dependent on human efforts. The church is of God, who created it sustains it until that time when we stand as Christ's bride in the presence of the angels.

It's not about what we do or even what we think we do. It's about what God does in and through us.

Kent Crockett, in his book *I once was blind, but now I Squint* tells a fascinating story that kind of sums it all up. During the 1930s, 250 men held the ropes to a dirigible to keep it from floating away. Suddenly a gust of wind caught one end of the dirigible, lifting it high off the ground.

Some of the men immediately let go of their ropes and fell safely to the ground. Others panicked, clinging firmly to the end of their ropes as the nose of the dirigible rose to greater heights. Several men who couldn't keep holding on fell and were seriously injured.

One man, however, continued to dangle high in the air for 45 minutes until he was rescued. Reporters later asked him how he was able to hold on to the rope for so long. "I didn't hold on to the rope," he replied. "I just tied it around my waist, and the rope held on to me."

Commenting on this incident, Crockett says, "Instead of trying to hold on to God, let God hold on to you."

That's the story of the church. We serve God by giving our labor and our gifts, and we do so gladly because we believe in God's work. But the truth is that it is not we who are holding on to God. It is God who is holding on to us. It is God who will not let us fail in our mission to deliver the good news to everyone we encounter.

"When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting . . ."

A violent wind scatters things far and wide. You and I are 2,000 years and many thousands of miles removed from the room where the disciples gathered on that first Pentecost. But the violent wind, the Spirit of the Living God, has blown its way from that room into our lives. And we are eternally grateful because of it.