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## **“Zephyred Away”**

**A sermon by  
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**Pentecost Sunday  
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**Genesis 9: 1–11; Acts 2: 1–21; John 14: 15–20**

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*Who has seen the wind?*

*Neither I nor you.*

*But when the leaves hang trembling,*

*The wind is passing through.*

*Who has seen the wind?*

*Neither you nor I.*

*But when the trees bow down their heads*

*The wind is passing by.* (Christina Rossetti (1830-1894))

What kind of wind was it

that blew through the whole house that Pentecost day in Jerusalem?

Was it a breeze, that rustled leaves, that raised dust and moved small branches,

that caused trees to sway and wavelets to form on waterways?

Was it a near gale, where whole trees swayed and walking was difficult?

Was it a storm, where trees were uprooted

and structural damage to buildings occurred?

Or was it a violent storm, where widespread damage happened?

When Francis Beaufort, a man of great curiosity,

who relished physical observation,

derived his Beaufort Scale in the 1830's to describe and define wind,  
he based his scale **upon the wind's effects upon the environment,**  
because, "who can see the wind?".

Since he couldn't see it,

he could only describe the wind's intensity based upon  
what happened when it blew, on a scale of 0 to 12.

At Beaufort 1 – smoke moves, but weather vanes don't.

At level 2 – leaves move, but not branches.

At level 4 – dust rises and branches wave.

At level 5 – wavelets form on water.

At level 6 – telegraph wire whistle.

At level 8 – walkers start having difficulty.

At levels 9 – 12 chimneys and roofs depart and structural damage occurs.

And so, we ask the same question concerning the Holy Spirit?

Who has seen it? How do we define it?

Luke, the writer of Acts,

describes the Pentecost event as a sudden sound or noise,  
out of heaven, as if carried along by a violent wind (Acts 2:2).

Biblical scholar Eugene Peterson describes the Holy Spirit as the "shy member  
of the Trinity", who transforms our lives into Christ's life.

(M. Craig Barnes. *The Christian Century*. 5/4/2010, p. 44)

Theologian Dan Migliore notes that most of the debates in classical theology  
are about the status of the Spirit, concerning its person and its  
relationship to the Father and the Son  
in the eternal triune life.

The doctrine of the work of the Spirit in the world,  
especially in relation to the transformation of human life  
has been under-developed, he says.

(Migliore. *Faith Seeking Understanding*, p. 171)

So, let me take a stab at developing it a little bit.

I think I saw "the shy member of the Trinity" once, based upon its effects;  
upon what happened when it zephyred shyly into town.

It was back when our children were young, still just little wigglers,  
that Hedge and I decided to take them to a baseball game one evening,  
at the old Ernie Shore Field in Winston-Salem.

We bought our tickets and, on the way to our seats,  
loaded up with all the appropriate diversions:  
popcorn, hotdogs, peanuts and drinks.

And then we settled in somewhere behind the netting that catches pop flies  
and foul balls to sit, eat, sweat and watch.

I was watching anything BUT baseball, and noticed just to the left of us,  
behind a chain-link fence, a blend of neighborhood children  
who probably could not afford tickets,  
but who wanted to enjoy the occasion, nevertheless.

They were a boisterous, energetic group,  
standing, jumping, turning cartwheels, making clover chains and crowns,  
and whistles from single strands of grass.

The day was hot, the breeze was scarce, the game was,  
shall I admit, BORING, as are all baseball games to me.

At any rate, during an inning change, they announced over the PA system,  
that a hot-air balloon would soon be arriving overhead,  
and that during the seventh-inning stretch,  
children would be invited down on the field, to have a turn  
at catching \$1 bills to be dropped from the balloon.

Suddenly the game became more interesting for everyone!

My children wiped the ketchup off their fingers onto their clothes,  
to shield their eyes and scan the skies for a dot of a balloon.

And sure enough, over the horizon comes this beautiful hot-air balloon.

The excitement in the stands was palpable.

The noise level rose,

and all of the children were pointing and waving

as the balloon descended and stopped just over the playing field.

Then, as announced, at the seventh inning stretch,

the children were invited down onto the playing field.....

*some* of the children, that is.

Not all of the children were invited onto the "un-level" playing field;

only designated children, pre-selected and well-groomed,

whose parents were patrons of the baseball team.

Which meant that the children behind the chain-link fence were still

fenced out, as were our children and those behind the protective netting,

whose parents were just popcorn and peanut patrons,

and not legitimate contributors.

My children were crushed, and started to whine and complain.

The fenced out children, I noticed, were riveted,

with fingers laced through the little metal diamonds

and noses pushed through the links.

And the children of honor on the field, all spiffed up for the photo-op,

stood around the pitcher's mound looking up expectantly,

with arms extended skyward.

When suddenly, there came from heaven, a sudden breeze,

a Pentecost puff, more like a Beaufort level 4 zephyr,

catching those little \$1 bills that had started to drift downward,

and gently encouraging them to take about a 90 degree turn,

and float just above the outstretched arms of the children of privilege,

across the in-field, over the chain-link fence,

and into the hands of neighborhood hoi-polloi,

who could not believe their good fortune... or good providence:

money from heaven!

And a wail went up from the children on the field;  
and wild cheering went up from the children in the stands;  
and the children behind the fence took the money and ran home  
to tell of their surprise windfall, their Pentecost moment,  
when a whisp of righteousness ran the bases.

I wonder how the Prosperity Gospel people would explain that one!  
So, I think I've seen the Holy Spirit, the shy member of the Trinity,  
which presented as a mere zephyr, but had the effects of a violent wind,  
because it came out of the blue, as total gift, as total grace,  
and it was a game-changer, and it was a name-changer:  
the rich became poor; the poor became rich;  
the boring became suddenly very interesting;  
the secular event became God's sacred theatre;  
and those who came in crying, went out with shouts of joy.

And likewise, I think I saw the Holy Spirit, based upon what it effects,  
Civil Rights Act became law, when the Berlin wall came down,  
and when apartheid was abolished in South Africa.

On that first Pentecost day, who could see the Holy Spirit?

Luke could only describe its intensity **based upon what happened**  
when God blew the breath of new life into the people of God;  
another new beginning, another burst of inspiration.

Fifty-three days after Jesus' crucifixion, fifty days after his resurrection,  
ten days after his ascension,

the Spirit is described as descending upon the disciples,  
and upon the other unnamed, yet faithful, men and women,  
who have been waiting together expectantly in a house in Jerusalem.

There are possibly 120 of them packed tightly in that house;  
a fire marshal's nightmare.

Most of them are unnamed, but we could give them names,

based upon their predominant attitudes.

We could give them names like Anxious, Discouraged, Withdrawn,  
Left-Behind, Orphaned, Purposeless, Empty, Tired, Doubtful, Powerless,  
Afraid to Believe.

And then they are wind-filled with the Holy Spirit,  
and they tumble from the womb of their tight quarters  
into the bright morning light of the streets below  
where a crowd of foreign pilgrims has gathered,  
drawn by the strange sounds emanating from that house.

And through the power of the Holy Spirit,  
these Galileans begin to babble  
to what has just happened in different languages,  
to make themselves understood by the by-standers,  
each in his or her own tongue.

Through the wind of the Holy Spirit,  
the believers are filled, sent out, empowered, encouraged,  
accompanied, and enabled to speak of God's mighty deeds  
so that they are miraculously understood by all.

Their names are changed drastically, whether they realize it or not.  
The empty are filled with the new wine of the Spirit;  
the anxious are boldly confident;  
the withdrawn are socially engaged;  
the purposeless are empowered with a new sense of mission;  
the doubtful can believe again;  
and the orphaned begin to find a new God-family called Church.

And then there's Peter, the one person who's named in the story.  
Peter, whose name had devolved for "Rock" in his relationship with Jesus,  
to Bumbling, to Permanently Puzzled, to Denier,  
to Coward, to Asleep on the Job.

Peter is gifted and graced by God's sudden blast of Spirit wind,  
and is given new voice and new courage  
to address the crowd of strangers with confidence and boldness,  
quoting the prophet Joel to explain the miraculous fulfillment  
of Jesus' promise and Joel's premonition:  
the pouring out of God's Holy Spirit on everyone,  
young and old, men and women, even you and me.  
Peter's new Spirit-name is Bold, Confident, Eloquent, Inspired, Evangelist,  
Personal, Fisher of Men and Women, of Jew and Gentile.

Friends, the game has changed, the game is ever-changing.  
God's Holy Spirit, that shy member of the Trinity,  
has been unleashed in the world, creating new life,  
new possibilities, and gifting each of us with new Spirit names.  
In this place called church, this place that Martin Luther referred to as  
a hospital for sinners, God's Spirit, the Spirit of Jesus,  
meets us at this font to wash us clean of our sin  
and to heal us for new service;  
and God's Spirit, the Spirit of Jesus,  
meets us at this table, the Lord's Table,  
to unite our hearts with Christ,  
and to give us new hearts for ministry that emanate  
from the very heart of Christ himself,  
with new names, befitting our baptismal callings.

You know the old nomenclatures; I hear them all the time:  
Failure; Addicted; Unfaithful; Abused; Pained; Suicidal;  
HIV Positive; Unemployed; Guilty; Misunderstood;  
Depressed; Illegal; Broke; Childless; Widowed; Alone.  
But do you know your new Spirit name?

And do you believe in the power of God,  
through the woosh of the Holy Spirit  
to love you into your new baptismal identity and call you new names:  
Affirmed, Graced, Comforted, Safe, Forgiven, Valued,  
Familiated, Healed, Found, Honored, Seen, Heard,  
Blessed, Joyful, Empowered, Encouraged, Beloved.

God's Spirit, the Spirit of Jesus is on the loose in this world and  
in the church universal and in this church particular  
to transform our lives into Christ's life, and to transform this world  
into the Kingdom of our Lord.

Beginning today, let us embrace the wind, of our transformation:

God's promised gift of the Holy Spirit, and claim our new names. Amen.