

"IS THERE ANY WIND?"

A Sermon By

Philip A. C. Clarke

Park Avenue United Methodist Church
106 East 86th Street
New York, New York 10028
May 30, 1993

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INTRODUCTION

A minister up there in Salem, New Hampshire, by the name of Tom Kinsey, tells of his search for the "perfect" birthday card for his 75 year old father. Standing there in the card shop on Main Street in Salem, his eye kept coming back to one particular card, a card that had a drawing of two boats tied to a dock in what appeared to be a New England town.

Although Tom Kinsey lives in New Hampshire, his parents live down in the hills of West Virginia some distance from the ocean. His parents had never owned a boat or even shown any interest in boating. His dad apparently had a childhood experience that caused him to fear the water. As a result he had never learned how to swim...but Kinsey kept coming back to this particular birthday card showing two boats because, as he put it, "there was something very meaningful about it...."

Kinsey describes his father as being a very simple man. If you drew a line through the pilgrimage of life, his father would not vary from that line one bit. He believed in simplicity. We would call his life style as "uncomplicated".

As Kinsey looked at this card, he noticed that one boat was a sailboat and the other boat was a rowboat. He wondered...if his father had to make the choice of which boat he would prefer to cross a body of water, which would he choose? Kinsey tells us that he bought the card and mailed it to his dad along with a note telling him of the thoughts that had crossed his mind in the card shop. Then he asked his father this question,

"Dad...in your simple style of living, and with your ability to decide things that make the most sense, which boat would you choose?"

Several weeks later he received a note back from his father with this line,

"I noticed that the rowboat had no engine, but that the sailboat had a sail. My question, son, before making a decision would be....is there any wind?"

Today, dear friends, we celebrate the birthday of the Church, known as the Day of Pentecost. And the question we want to ask is, "Is there any wind?" Must we spend the rest of our days rowing...dependent only on our power alone, or might we put up our sails and catch the "winds of God?" blowing across our world. Is there any wind? That's the question before us this morning and before we come up with an answer, let's go back and review the story of that first Pentecost.

FIRST PENTECOST: A MIGHTY WIND

Those of you who know the account of that first Pentecost will recall that there was a mighty wind. Early in the morning 120 believers were meeting together in a house in Jerusalem to wait and pray as Jesus had instructed them. As they were worshipping together, they heard a loud sound coming from the sky. It was the wind. The wind was howling like it never had before. They looked up and saw what looked like giant tongues of fire descending. The tongues of fire landed on each person present. And in that dramatic moment all the believers were filled with the Holy Spirit. And they each began speaking in different languages, "as the spirit gave them ability". (Acts 2: 4)

Then an interesting thing happened. People on the streets and nearby houses heard the commotion and wanted to find out what was going on. Soon the believers themselves, caught up with the Spirit, spilled out onto the street as we;;/ A crowd began to gather. Remember Jerusalem was a metropolitan city filled with people from all over the known world. The bystanders heard the believers speaking in these foreign languages, some of which they recognized. Some of them even heard the disciples speaking in their own native tongue. They were amazed and asked each other, "Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each of us in his own native language?"

It was truly amazing, nothing like this had ever happened before. But a wind was blowing - the wind of God's spirit.

Calvin Miller tells of a Pentecost Sunday service he spent in Brussels where he worshipped in the Cathedral of St. Michael. The worship service was in two languages both of which were unfamiliar to him. Part of the service was in Latin, of which he understood a few words, and the rest of the service was spoken in Flemish which he did not understand at all. Since it was Pentecost Sunday he thought the unintelligible service might be about the Holy Spirit. He thumbed his English Bible to the Second Chapter of Acts and tried to follow the Cardinal who was leading the service. The Cardinal was totally unaware that a Baptist preacher from Oklahoma was there, spying on the Litany, the Cardinal's Litany, but very much in need of the Lord.

Miller testifies that he was able to worship there far away from home in two unknown languages because (as he put it),

"A fire was loose in the world that makes Jerusalem, and Oklahoma and Belgium all one....."

There was a fire loose on that first Pentecost and that fire was fanned by the very wind of God!

THOSE ALERT UNDERSTOOD

Notice, however, that only those who were alert to God's activity really understood what it was all about and what was happening.

The people outside of the house of the believers were amazed and somewhat perplexed. They didn't have a clue as to what was going on. Their only possible explanation of what they were witnessing (and I love this) was that the believers were drunk. On the other hand, the believers, knew exactly what was happening. They had been meeting faily for prayer and worship. As soon as the Holy Spirit descended upon them they knew Christ's promise was being fulfilled. When we are alert to God we can see and hear things that other people are apt to miss.

Allan Danforth tells us of a dramatic conversion that he experienced. Shortly afterward he was invited by a missionary evalgenlist to go to Ghana, West Africa. While there he tells us that he saw starvation and deprivation beyond comprehension. He said he was bombarded by one horror story after another and on the long flight home he asked,

"Lord....why did you ever send me here? What can anybody do? It's absolutely hopeless...just beyong belief!"

Then Allen says that he heard the voice of God speaking within, and that he would be held "accountable" for what he had seen there in West Africa. He recalls,

"I got a knot in my stomach. I didn't have a vision, but in my mind's eye, I could see myself standing all alone before Christ and having to account for my life. (That experience became a priority in his life). "When I got off that plane in this country, I didn't know the first thing about being a missionary....but I knew that I could share a vision. I could at least tell people what I'd seen."

Allen was alert to God's action in his life. Being sensitive to the Spirit. A wind was blowing and he knew it and felt it. One may wonder just what happens when the winds of God blow across a person's life? Let me share with you in the remaining moments two things that I believe do happen.

THE MEDIOCRE BECOMES MAGNIFICENT

First of all, that which is mediocre becomes magnificent.

Many were the times when the disciples just didn't seem "to get it" - to get the point of what Jesus was trying to teach them. It makes you wonder why on earth did He ever choose these men at all. He spoke to them of humility and service and the disciples fought for positions of power. There was the time when they thought that Jesus was going to take Jerusalem by force and Jesus was trying to tell them He was going there to die.

Peter was often the spokesman for the apostles, but Peter had more than his share of shortcomings. When Jesus spoke of His death and resurrection, it was Peter, you'll remember, who said, "God forbid it, Lord." And after the arrest of Jesus, it was Peter who denied knowing Him. While Jesus was dying there on the cross, Peter was hiding out somewhere fearful for his life. Peter kept a low profile in the very hours of Jesus' greatest need. So low, you couldn't even see him. All of this changed once the Holy Spirit descended and Peter felt it. He and the others were transformed from a band of cowards into courageous advocates of their faith. Once timid and afraid, Peter was now bold and outspoken.

I think we would say that Pentecost was Peter's greatest moment. He heard the remarks about the believers being "filled with wine". He stood before the crowd and declared,

"Men of Judea and all who live here in Jerusalem, let this be known to you and listen to what I say. These persons are not drunk as you suppose, for it is only nine o'clock in the morning."

And Peter then called to their attention the word of the Prophet Joel.

Now this wasn't the same Peter we encountered earlier in the Gospels. He was now empowered by the Holy Spirit. He addressed the crowd with boldness and rare eloquence. A mediocre life had become magnificent. That can happen when the wind of God blows upon it and stirs it to new life.

I sometimes think that we are not always aware of the power that we possess. A cardiologist at a California Hospital recently conducted an experiment in healing. Some 393 seriously ill cardiac patients were studied. From this group 192 were selected randomly for special treatment. The special treatment was prayer. Selected people around the country were asked to pray for each of these 192 patients. Their conditions were described in detail. The people praying were to focus

their prayers toward "beneficial healing and quick recovery". The remaining patients were given the usual medical care without prayer.

Ten months later, the results revealed a startling conclusion. The patients who were lifted up in prayer experienced markedly fewer incidences of cardiac-related infections, pulmonary edema and mortality than did the 201 patients not prayed for. It's important to note that the patients selected for prayer did not even know they were being prayed for. And the people praying had never met the patients for whom they were asking some Divine help. To them, they were just names. And yet, their prayers worked, reminding us once again of the truth of that line from the poet, "more things are wrought by prayer than this world has ever dreamed."

If prayer can accomplish so much at a distance, what might happen in our lives and in our church if we were to pray for those close at hand? Lives would be transformed and so would the Church. We do not fully realize the power that is at our disposal. The mediocre can become magnificent is one way of putting

THE DEAD CAN COME ALIVE

And even more impressively, that which was dead can come alive!

A colleague writing in one of our church journals tells of driving through West Texas one day in early July. As he drove through, he "agonized" for anyone or anything that had to try to live in the barren desert. A rainless winter and spring had left the desert absolutely parched. "Worst in memory" was the common observation of the locals.

Then some six weeks later and after five inches of rain had fallen, this friend reports that he retraced his steps through the "parched" desert, but now he reports it was quite different. He said that "I saw a contrast that was nothing less than miraculous". By mid-August the desert is usually green from summer rains, but this year it was positively luxuriant and truly magnificent. Countless patches of brightly colored wild flowers dotted the roadside. The extremes were notable even to those most familiar with the rebirth that rain brings to the desert.

This is what happens when a "life-bringing" wind blows across a parched desert. And this is also what happens when the wind of God's spirit blows across a life, yes even our lives. We are refreshed, empowered, transformed.

TODAY'S QUESTION

And so the question for this morning as we join together in celebrating Pentecost, is: IS THERE ANY WIND? Are we left to row our boat slowly and painfully across the waters of life all alone, or may we put up our sails to catch the winds of God that sweep across the world. I trust you know the answer.

Did you know that the word for spirit and the word for wind are the same in Hebrew. What a joy it is for me to remind you that the Spirit of God, the mighty wind of God, is still available to you and to me. Yes, available even here in this place and on this Sunday to all who desire it. This I believe and I invite you to hoist the sail of your life and catch something of the wind of the spirit.

I close with those lines penned by Christina Rossetti, entitled The Wind that some of you may have committed to memory in earlier years.

"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."

PRAYER

On this Day of Pentecost, we would pray that we may be transformed by Your Spirit's coming upon us...taking away our fear, and making us bold to face the enemies of Christ, and giving us the power to offer a convincing witness to the world that in Christ Jesus You have reconciled the world to Yourself. Give to each of us a personal story to tell and lips to proclaim it with joy and certainty. All this we now ask in the name and spirit of Christ, our Lord...with heads bowed as the wind of God's spirit passes through this place.

ANNOUNCEMENTS: Sunday, May 30, 1993

GREETING / VISITORS

- A. A word of warm welcome to the visitors...pleased and hope...
Be free in the sharing of your name...fill out...or sign one..
Come, worship with us....come, work with us....
- B. Doing the "Lord's work" here at this busy corner...since 1837.
We minister in the name of Christ, and it is in His loving spirit...
Members: wear name tags and make at least one new friend in the
time....memorize the name of that person. Be sure to get to know
some of those new members of two weeks ago....

PARISH CONCERNS

- A. Parish concerns are listed for you..."lifted up" in the
bulletin and the monthly news sheet. A quiet week coming along.
Church office closed tomorrow.
- B. However, "Hounds" will meet on Tuesday evening and the Aldersgate
Class on Wednesday evening.
- C. Today is the last Sunday to make a special "love" gift for the
work of our Health Care Agencies....a few more gifts should put
us over \$ 500.00 which is quite good. \$ 440.00 to date...
- D. We come to the month of June...a bit less activity going on...
Annual Conference, June 10 - 13. June 19th Church Picnic...be
thinking about it. June 21st - METHODIST NIGHT out at Shea
Stadium. Tickets on sale. See Jan Ernst. \$ 12.00 each....we
have some 50 tickets to sell. Conference has signed up for 1000.
If we sell them all, \$5000 for Camp Olmstead, scholarships for
city kids. Good cause, believe me.

OFFERING

- A. Jesus said:

"It is more blessed to give than
to receive....." In this spirit,
let us worship God...

PASTORAL PRAYER: May 30, 1993

O GOD, OUR FATHER. Father of our spirits, and the Father of all mankind.

AS WE COME together in this hour set aside for prayer and reflection, fill our hearts and our minds with a greater consciousness of Your presence and nearness.

IT IS NOT ALTOGETHER habit and custom that have brought us here today, but also our deep sense of need, our desire to learn more of Your will and Your way in our lives.

O GOD, YOU KNOW all too well the many things on our minds this day.

The concerns with which we wrestle,
The fears that tear at us,
The problems that harrass us,
The worries that haunt us,
The temptations that confront us,
The goals that attract us.

AS WE WORSHIP YOU, help each of us to renew our hold on those secret sources of strength, that we may depart from here renewed, refreshed, revitalized from an encounter with You as we find You coming to us in Jesus Christ our Lord and Saviour.

Touch our eyes that we may see you. Open our ears that we may hear Your voice speaking in our hearts. Flood our hearts with love that we may have that measure of inner peace and quietness that comes to those whose minds are fastened on You.

OUR THOUGHTS AND PRAYERS REACH OUT to include all sorts and conditions of mankind:

Strengthen and confirm the faithful.
Visit and relieve the sick.
Restore the penitent and reclaim the lost.
Arouse the careless and the indifferent.
Comfort the lonely, the bereaved, the discouraged.

Where there is fear, bring faith.
Where there is guilt, bring forgiveness.
Where there is despair, shed light and love.
Where there is illness, bring healing.

FINALLY, LORD JESUS, let YOUR love so possess our spirits that whatever we are called to do in word or deed, we may do in Your strength ...Your name. In the spirit of Christ, we pray.

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