

SERMON: Listening to the Wind

TEXT: Acts 2:1-21

It was the late 1960's when I sat with my mom and my two sisters on the cold, metal folding chairs in the cafetorium of St. Peter's Catholic School. We were members of the Catholic church at that time because my Presbyterian mother had agreed to raise her children in the Catholic church when she married my Roman Catholic father. Truth be told, I don't think my dad really cared where we went to church, but his Irish-Catholic mother was the one who put her foot down.

Most of the time, instead of attending mass in the big sanctuary of the church, we went to the contemporary service, in order to appease my cranky teenage sister. She liked the music, and I did, too. Accompanied by guitar, we sang popular, hippie, war-protest songs like, *If I Had a Hammer* and *Blowin' in the Wind*. Remember? "The answer, my friend, is blowin' in the wind; the answer is blowin' in the wind.

I looked up the lyrics the other day, and some of them are still quite fitting for our time, even fifty years later.

Yes, 'n' how many years can a mountain exist  
Before it's washed to the sea?  
Yes, 'n' how many years can some people exist  
Before they're allowed to be free?

Yes, 'n' how many times can a man turn his head  
And pretend that he just doesn't see?  
The answer, my friend, is blowin' in the wind  
The answer is blowin' in the wind

Yes, 'n' how many times must a man look up  
Before he can see the sky?  
Yes, 'n' how many ears must one man have  
Before he can hear people cry?  
Yes, 'n' how many deaths will it take till he knows  
That too many people have died.  
The answer, my friend, is blowin' in the wind  
The answer is blowin' in the wind

Anyway, I thought of the song because of Pentecost and the sound of the wind.

There were so many amazing and astonishing things happening in that place on that day when “devout Jews from every nation” gathered all together in Jerusalem. A sound like the rush of a violent wind. Divided tongues of fire resting on each of them. And then, they began to speak in other languages. But every person heard in their own native language. And all were speaking about God’s deeds of power.

Three Session members and I rode to St. Louis on Friday for a meeting, and on the way home, I asked if they would share some of their experiences with the Holy Spirit. We listened to one another tell stories of the glorious, miraculous

signs we see in nature. Stories of being called by God. Stories of tragedies and struggles and trials and how God carries us through: sending the right person at the right time, giving us strength that we never thought we had, and providing a sense of peace when chaos was all around. Learning about another person's faith often inspires our own faith.

I remember sharing Thanksgiving dinner with my boyfriend and his family years ago. There were probably ten or twelve people around the table, all talking at once and enjoying every bite of food, when my boyfriend's mother suddenly shushed us. She stood up and held her hands out, saying, "Shhhh! I smell something!" Everyone burst out laughing, because on the face of it her statement made no sense. Why would you need everyone to be quiet so that you could smell something? Does listening more carefully serve to heighten our sense of smell?

It's funny, but many of us understand the concept. I often listen to music when I'm driving. But if I'm unfamiliar with the area and need to pay close attention to where I'm going, I have to turn the music off. Not so that I can hear Siri on my phone tell me to "proceed to the route" when I've taken a wrong turn, but to cut down on distractions and focus the energy of all my senses on just one task.

Imagine being in the room on that first Pentecost Day. Your senses are being bombarded with the sound of the wind, the glow and the heat of flames hovering just overhead, and all these different languages being spoken all at once. Wouldn't you be tempted to stand up and tell everyone to "Stop!"?

Actually, that's what Peter finally did. "Standing with the eleven, Peter raised his voice and addressed them, *Men of Judea and all who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and listen to what I say.*" And then he reminded them of the scriptures and the words of the prophet Joel, who described what would happen when God poured out his Spirit upon all flesh. "Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams."

It occurs to me that there's a lot of listening going on here. People are listening to the wind, listening to a variety of voices speaking a myriad of languages, listening to Peter, and listening to the words of a prophet who suggests that we should be listening to the prophecies of sons and daughters, listening to the young tell of their visions, and listening to the old tell of their dreams.

And now it occurs to me that seldom are we accused of listening too much. No one has ever heard a teacher scold a classroom full of students, “People, there’s entirely too much listening going on here.”

No, we certainly don’t listen too much! In fact, one theologian questioned, “Would a contemporary Pentecost in our context entail disciples listening more than speaking? Getting together to seek a word from the Lord, rather than entering the sanctuary solidly convinced we know what God says? I wonder if being silent is a prerequisite for colluding with the Holy Spirit, or at least not obstructing the wind, flame and words given to us by God and about God.... We need Pentecost,” she wrote, “an unmistakable in-breaking of the Holy Spirit,” and she suggested that “we – as disciples of Jesus Christ – should gather [on Pentecost] and be silent, eagerly, on-the-edge-of-our-seat anticipating the fire and wind, the word of the Lord that tells of God’s deeds of power not just when Jesus walked the earth but right here and now. The Body of Christ... must be willing to silence in it any voice but God’s, remembering that God’s words are not ours and that God speaks in a multitude of languages and through the people we often least expect.”

(Jill Duffield, *Looking Into the Lectionary*, The Presbyterian Outlook, June 3, 2019)

Let us, for a few moments, be silent and listen for the wind and wait for the movement of the Holy Spirit. The silence will offer us the opportunity to focus all our senses on just listening. With every breath we take, let us invite the Spirit in. Like the words we sang earlier, think to yourself, “Holy Spirit, come to us.” Inhale on the words, “Holy Spirit.” Exhale on the words, “Come to us.” And may God’s voice silence all others.

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May all of us spend more time LISTENING FOR THE WIND, and may everyone who calls on the name of the Lord be saved... to the glory of God!

AMEN.