

The Wind beneath Our Wings

Pentecost—May 31, 2009

by Robert Bowler

Readings: [Acts 2:1-21](#); [Psalm 104: 25-35,37](#); [Romans 8:22-27](#); [John 15:26-27; 16:4b-15](#)

I. Airfoils

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

I had a summer job in college teaching sailing. I earned some money while doing what I loved. At the first lesson, before we went out on the boat, I taught the students about airfoils. As the air flows over a curved, wing-like surface, a vacuum forms behind and beneath the wing that the air rushes to fill. This rush of wind beneath and behind the wings of a plane or a bird lifts and pushes the plane or the bird up and forward. Literally, it is the wind beneath the wings that makes flight possible.

Sails, too, are airfoils. They act just like this when they are close-hauled and the boat is heading to windward. The wind flows across the sail, and a vacuum is formed downwind of the curved sail which the wind rushes to fill. This leeward rush of wind pushes or lifts the boat forward. So sailing is like flying.

“A rush of violent wind... filled the entire house.” The disciple’s wings spread like airfoils. The breath of God lifted and propelled them forward to do God’s will.

II. The Breath of God

What is this wind, this breath, this fire, called the Holy Spirit?

The Comforter may have been released, particularly into the hearts and minds of those whom he loved and loved him, as a result of Christ’s ultimate giving of himself unto death. But we know this is not the first appearance of the Holy Spirit.

It moved over the waters at the moment of creation. God breathed on the first human and he became a living soul. Breath is an analogy for life throughout much of the Old Testament and Job says “my breath is in me” meaning my life is yet whole. In the Psalm for today, we read: “You take away their breath and they die and return to dust. You send forth your Spirit, and they are created; and so you renew the face of the earth.” And John writes about the time when the resurrected Jesus breathed on the disciples and they received the Holy Spirit.

The breath of God is primordial power quickening creation, and now, today, we re-member the birth of the church when the disciples were all together in one place.

III. New Gifts Healing an Ancient Wound

Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.

The quickening was like fire in their midst giving them new gifts, the ability to speak in other languages. Through God's Word, His speech, all things came to be in creation, and now, at Pentecost, a new creation is coming through the disciples, through gifts of speech given them by the fire of the Spirit.

This new creation brings healing to an ancient wound laid upon humanity by God. In Genesis, Chapter 11, we read, "The whole earth was of one language and one speech." But, because the children of men, in their pride, thought they could do anything, symbolized by their building a tower that reached up to heaven itself, God confounded their speech and scattered them across the earth. The place was therefore called Babel, a confusion and a scattering. Through the disciples, the Spirit now works to reverse the confusion, "So that" as Christ said in prayer to God, "they may be one as we are one":

Now 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 the native language of each. Amazed and astonished, they asked, "Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native languages? Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt, and the parts Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabs—in our own languages we hear them speaking about God's deeds of power."

The wind rushed in beneath their wings, and they spoke with power and authority so that all, the whole of the known world, may be one as God and Christ are one. This event of Pentecost birthed the Church through which the Spirit breathed words and deeds of power so that all may be reunited and renewed as when the fresh dew of creation was still wet in the garden.

IV. Filled with New Wine

There were doubters in the crowd, as there have been throughout church history. There were those who scoffed, "they are filled with new wine." But Peter, the rock upon which Christ built his church, quelled them saying:

No, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel: "In the last days it will be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams."

Now, this is the moment when many Christians are whipped into a fever pitch about the end times and the second coming. Pentecostalists begin speaking in tongues (languages no one

understands, by the way), a dangerous shaking and quaking and rolling in the aisles. This sort of thing sounds like being filled with new wine to me.

V. God Abhors a Vacuum

I want to explain the day of Pentecost not with fire and brimstone, but with stillness and peace.

The rushing wind of the Spirit fills a vacuum beneath our wings. “God abhors a vacuum,” preached Meister Eckhart in the 14th century, and, in his plenitude, rushes to fill it with his breath. The wind blows and lifts us, propelling us forward, when we are still and quiet within. These wings cannot be seen, for they are of the soul, of the very same life breathed into us by God when we were born. “Be still and know that you are God.” Yes, there is movement. We are like feathers on the breath of God, the 12th century mystic Hildegard von Bingen sang, but the rush of that wind cannot be seen by eyes of flesh nor felt on the skin; it is known only by the lift it gives to the soul, the gifts of the spirit.

VI. New Gifts to Heal and Renew

We are known by our fruits. We are known by the gifts we are given by the Spirit’s living breath upon us. However, we can only receive that breath when we open our spiritual eyes and ears through prayer and meditation, when the Spirit finds and enters the quiet place with us. We can only receive that breath by opening our hearts and our minds to the movement of the Spirit over the deep waters of our souls. Then we can trim our sails so as not to capsizes due to the sudden rush of wind meant to propel us forward. Know you not that you are the temple of God and the Spirit of God is within you?

The Spirit still speaks with tongues of fire, if we have ears to hear. It lifts and propels us forward with new gifts to heal our church and renew the world around us so that, one day, all may be one as Christ and God are one. *Amen.*