

"Catch the Wind"

It's been about 7 weeks since the Risen Christ ascended to the Father. As per His instructions, Jesus' followers have gathered in Jerusalem, praying, and waiting for God to send the Holy Spirit on them as Jesus had promised. Then it happens! "When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting...all of them were filled with the Holy Spirit"(Acts 2:1-2, 4a).

There is this sound of a huge gust of wind that fills the house. *Wooosh!* These followers of Jesus are filled with the Holy Spirit. Once timid and fearful, they now boldly begin to take the message of Jesus into the world! *Could we use more of that Holy Spirit in our lives and in our churches today? I would think!*

One of the signs of the Holy Spirit's coming, and of the presence of God, is wind. "A violent wind came from heaven"(Acts 2:2). It's interesting that the word in the New Testament for "spirit" is the Greek word "pneuma". That can also be translated "wind" or "breath". And in the Old Testament the Hebrew word for "spirit" is the word "ruach", which can also mean "wind". We have this imagery in the Bible that when the Spirit of God is present in the world and in our lives, it's like a breeze, or gust of wind - it's the very breath of God! Somebody wrote a book called *Like a Mighty Wind*. It's a book about Holy Spirit!

Since the Holy Spirit is portrayed as wind or breeze, let's think about what this might tell us about the Spirit and His work. ***First of all, it reminds us that the Holy Spirit brings about the new creation.*** The Bible begins with these words: "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and Spirit of God was hovering over the waters" (Genesis 1:1-2). There was this formless chaos. Then the wind of God, or it could read the "Spirit of God", moved upon the face of the deep - and God began to create order out of chaos! The Holy Spirit was there, at creation!

That same Spirit who caused *physical* creation to take place also brings about the *new creation*, or *spiritual rebirth!* People are born again, and come to life spiritually! Jesus talked to Nicodemus about being born again. He said we all need it. And He likened the mystery of the new birth to the mystery of wind. Jesus said, "You should not be surprised at my saying, 'You must be born again'. The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit" (John 3:7-8). We can't totally explain the miracle of a spiritual rebirth, just as we can't totally explain the wind. But we can feel the wind, and see it's effects. And we can feel ourselves coming alive spiritually when we're born again, and see its effects when our lives are transformed by Christ!

2 Corinthians 5:17 says, "So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new." The Spirit of God, who was there at creation, is the same Spirit who brings about a new life and a new creation in us, when we turn from our sins and trust Christ as our Savior.

The Holy Spirit is the wind or breath of God. Then it suggests, too, *the Holy Spirit empowers us for victorious Christian living*. If you want to live as a *real follower of Jesus* (not just a nominal Christian), it isn't easy, is it? But God never intended that we try to live the Christian life in our own strength.

As a young Christian I read a book by an Episcopal priest named Sam Shoemaker. The book is titled, *With the Holy Spirit and Fire*. Sam Shoemaker talked about something called "the stream of the Spirit". He pictured the Holy Spirit moving as the jet stream, and said how we can get into that breeze, that flow, and find the power of God for daily living.

On longer commercial flights you can often monitor flight data like airspeed, outside temperature, wind speed, and a little GPS showing where the plane is. I like to look at that during the flight (make sure the pilots are doing everything OK!). There were times in my flights to Kenya and back when the speed of the jet stream was 100 mph. Shoemaker pictured a spiritual jet stream where we can access the awesome power of God's Spirit.

It's sort of like a sailplane. That aircraft without an engine is towed to a certain altitude and then turned loose, to ride the air currents. Any of you ever flown in a sailplane? The closest I've come is my Flight Simulator. It's so cool. There's very little noise except the wind, as the plane rides the air currents.

Picture yourself riding the strong currents of the wind of God and giving you victory over the difficult things you are facing in life. Maybe it's health issues. Family problems. Something you fear or dread. Imagine riding the wind of the Spirit and finding victory over our sins. The bad habits. The destructive attitudes. The sins that bind us.

Envision yourself surrendering to the Holy Spirit's power, riding the winds of the Spirit, and being transformed into a more beautiful person, more like Christ! The Bible talks about the "fruit of the Spirit" - what kind of person we'll be when the Spirit is in control. "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, meekness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control" (Galatians 5:22-23). As we ride the winds of the Spirit, that Spirit cleanses us and makes us a more winsome personality: more patient, kind, faithful, gentle, humble, loving, self-controlled.

Are we experiencing the powerful wind of the Spirit for victorious living? A pastor of mine used to ask different times, "Harry, do you have the victory?" Good question! Do *you* have the victory?

One night I went to a Flyers' hockey game. It was a rainy, stormy evening. By the time we got to the parking lot the rain had stopped but the wind was howling. I got out of the car and the wind was blowing right against my face. It was so strong that I actually at one point bent over, head down, walking into the wind. Once inside, I thought, I can't wait to get out. I'll just hold open my jacket and let the wind carry me to the car. (But by then, the wind had stopped).

A lot of us try to walk into the wind as we attempt to overcome the obstacles of life, and deal

with our sins and shortcomings. And the Spirit is saying, "Don't try to do this all yourself. Give yourself over to Me. Let me carry you through and give you the victory over these things! There's a beautiful song that relates how God will bear us up and carry us: "And God will raise you up on eagle's wings, bear you on the breath of dawn, make you to shine like the sun, and hold you in the palm of God's hand." As an eagle rides the air currents, we can ride the currents of the Holy Spirit and experience a power beyond our own!

The wind of the Spirit gives us spiritual rebirth, and carries us to higher levels of victorious living. And too, *the Holy Spirit brings about revival*. History records times of religious revivals. Whole communities, entire nations, experience a spiritual awakening! Whenever that happens, *it is the work of the Holy Spirit*.

Picture this: you're out in the hot sun, the stifling heat. You're sweaty, tired, feeling drowsy, sleepy. Then you feel a fresh breeze picking you up, and your spirit and body and mind feel revitalized, renewed. Life is broken. People get crushed under the load of life. Relationships turn sour. Dreams can die. People can wander far from God and the faith they once had. Churches get off track and become apathetic. Nations drift from God and become morally and spiritually bankrupt. *Can we live again?*

Do you remember the story of the valley of dry bones in the Old Testament? It's found in Ezekiel, chapter 37. "The hand of the LORD was on me, and he brought me out by the Spirit of the LORD and set me in the middle of a valley; it was full of bones. He led me back and forth among them, and I saw a great many bones on the floor of the valley, bones that were very dry. He asked me, 'Son of man, can these bones live?' I said, 'Sovereign LORD, you alone know.' Then he said to me, 'Prophecy to these bones and say to them, "Dry bones, hear the word of the LORD!" This is what the Sovereign LORD says to these bones: 'I will make breath enter you, and you will come to life. I will attach tendons to you and make flesh come upon you and cover you with skin; I will put breath in you, and you will come to life. Then you will know that I am the LORD'" (Ezekiel 37:1-6).

God's people Israel were in exile in a foreign land. Defeated. Did they have a future, any hope of becoming a strong nation again, in their own land? God said "Yes!". He gives this vision of dry bones coming together and coming alive! Notice verse 5: "I will make *breath* enter you, and you will come to life." And verse 6: "I will put *breath* in you, and you will come to life." In both cases, the word breath could be translated "spirit". God will breathe *His Spirit* into them! Would you say we need a spiritual revival today – in our nation, in our churches, in us as individuals? I think so!

Sometimes the wind of the Spirit comes in gale force! On the Day of Pentecost, in that upper room, it says there came on these followers of Jesus the sound of a "violent wind". We've all had experiences of strong winds. Ever been in a tornado? Or seen the effects of a tornado? In one community we lived, a tornado tore through one housing development. It affected the home of one family in the church. You could see where the tornado tore a path right through their neighborhood. We've probably had outdoor furniture blown, or tree limbs blown down, by high

winds, or shingles blown off the roof of our house.

Sometimes the wind of the Spirit is *gentle*, to soothe and heal. Revival comes that way. But other times the wind of the Spirit is like a *gale force, ferocious wind* that brings us to our knees in repentance, and pushes us to turn away from what is ugly and evil and destructive. Sometimes God just has to shake us up! That too, is revival!

Some of this dynamic is captured in something a man named Rich Kirchoff said. Mr. Kirchoff got up and spoke these words at an Annual Conference session of the United Methodist Church.

"It's a time to open up to the mind-blowing, heart-warming, life-changing power of God. The power of God can invade the body, inflate the mind, swell the soul, lift the spirit and make us more than we ever imagined. It'll make you young when you're old, and it'll make you live even when you die. The power and presence of the Spirit will disturb, delight, deliver and lift. When God sends forth the Spirit, 'the whole face of the earth is renewed'.

When God sends forth the Spirit, amazing things happen: barriers are broken, communities are formed, opposites are reconciled, unity is established, disease is cured, addictions are broken, cities are renewed, races are reconciled, people are blessed, and church happens.

Today the Spirit of God is present and we're gonna have church! So be ready, get ready...God is up to something...discouraged folks, cheer up, dishonest folks, fess up, sour folks, sweeten up, closed folks, open up, gossipers, shut up, sleeping folks, wake up, lukewarm folks, fire up, dry bones, shake up, and pew potatoes, stand up! But most of all, Christ the Savior of all the world is lifted up!"

Do you feel the wind of the Spirit moving! How can we catch the wind of the Spirit, and live in the stream of the Spirit? First, turn away from what is evil or sinful. The Spirit can't fill us if we've got a lot of crap in our soul! Second, quit trying to do everything ourselves, trying to live the Christian life in our own power. And finally, yield ourselves unreservedly, completely to the Spirit. Let Him carry us to new levels of victorious living!

The hymn says it beautifully: "Breathe on me, Breath of God, fill me with life anew, that I may love what Thou dost love, and do what Thou wouldst do.

"Breathe on me, Breath of God, till I am wholly thine, till all this earthly part of me glows with thy fire divine."

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Community United Methodist Church
May 23, 2021

