

Sermon: "Filled With New Wine"
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Acts 2:1-21 (NRSV)

[1] When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. [2] And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. [3] Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them.

[4] All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.

[5] Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. [6] And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each. [7] Amazed and astonished, they asked, "Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? [8] And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language? [9] Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, [10] Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, [11] Cretans and Arabs--in our own languages we hear them speaking about God's deeds of power." [12] All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, "What does this mean?" [13] But others sneered and said, "They are filled with new wine."

[14] But Peter, standing with the eleven, 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. [15] Indeed, these are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only nine o'clock in the morning. [16] No, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel:

[17] 'In the last days it will be, God declares,
that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh,
and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,
and your young men shall see visions,
and your old men shall dream dreams.

[18] Even upon my slaves, both men and women,
in those days I will pour out my Spirit;
and they shall prophesy.

[19] And I will show portents in the heaven above
and signs on the earth below,
blood, and fire, and smoky mist.

[20] The sun shall be turned to darkness
and the moon to blood, before the coming of the Lord's great and glorious day.

[21] Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.'

NEW WINE

"They are filled with new wine."

This was the charge made against the disciples after they preached in the power of the Spirit. Did you ever wonder why some people made this charge? What was it about those first spirit-filled disciples that made a charge of public drunkenness plausible?

I was thinking about our lively anthem for today, "Sit down servant; I can't sit down. My soul is so happy that I can't sit down." That song brings to mind a "spirit filled" Pentecostal revival complete with hand waving, dancing and shouting.

I wonder if the wind of the Spirit brought that kind of revival long ago on that first Pentecost Sunday. Were their souls so happy that they couldn't sit down?

Was the joy and hope released by the Spirit so surprising and overwhelming that some even thought that the disciples had been into the new sweet wine early that day? It's possible.

The ministry of Jesus was marked by surprising joy and spontaneity. His critics called him a winebibber and a glutton. They didn't like the fact that Jesus "partied" with all the wrong people, the "sinners". (Mt. 11:19)

But, Jesus countered that sometimes a party is in order, like when the wind of God's Spirit is in the process of making all things new.

The ministry of Jesus was all about new wine, that intoxicating freshly brewed wine of the Spirit. It was a wine that made old men and women dance and dream. It was a wine that even gave hope and a dream of freedom to those on the bottom rung of society, the slaves. When the Spirit entered the picture all bets were off.

We know from the history of the church that the Spirit did indeed shake things up in the ancient world. Slaves and masters worshipped together in the same house church. Women were given authority and jobs to do in the church. In short, all the rules of ancient society were broken. After the Spirit of God in Christ blew through Jerusalem on that first Pentecost Day, the world changed.

And the world continues to be changed by the Spirit even today. The new wine of the Spirit is still shaking us up and leading us on a journey into a greater ministry and a greater world.

OLD WINESKINS

Jesus once said that "no one puts new wine into old wineskins; otherwise the new wine will burst the skins and will be spilled, and the skins will be destroyed." (Luke 5:37) This statement was based upon a process that most would have been familiar to those first listeners.

When wine is new, the process of fermentation is still going on. Therefore, if you put new wine into old, brittle wineskins, the carbon dioxide will burst the container. The proper technique was to put the fresh wine into new wineskins. The new wineskins would have the flexibility to handle the changes that were taking place in the wine.

The kingdom of God as revealed in Jesus was new wine. It was an intoxicating, bubbly mix that could not be contained by the old religious rules and regulations. Embracing the new kingdom would require disciples to throw out their old containers, their old ways of thinking and embrace an entirely new way of life.

We Presbyterians talk about doing everything "decently and in order". Today's lesson reminds us that sometimes things happen in God's kingdom that are not so orderly. Sometimes God brings disorder and surprise to our one-dimensional and seemingly predictable world. Sometimes God makes us change wineskins so that we might receive a new intoxicating word of truth and salvation.

The wind of the Spirit often brings disruption to our personal lives as well. The wind of the Spirit often tears down the old way of life so that a new way of life can begin.

THE WINDS OF CHANGE

I was talking with a member this past week about the hurricanes and the changes they brought to our city. At first those winds were an ill wind indeed. Lives were disrupted. Property was damaged. Many of you tell me that you still have nightmares about those frightening days.

But, in the past few weeks and months, little by little, things have begun to change for the better. Damaged structures have been torn down. Trees have been cut down or pruned. Houses have been renovated. It has not been an easy process, but in the end our community may look better than it ever has before.

More than that, we will be better prepared for the storms that may come our way in the future. We'll have six nails per shingle. The windows will be sealed, and the storm shutters will be ready to hang.

Did you see the article in the paper this past Friday about the changes the hurricane made at the famous Bok Tower Gardens? The trees that went down during the hurricane enabled the landscapers to open up the views that had been blocked by the growth of trees over the years. Now, there is more light and color in the garden.

In fact, the newly renovated garden is much closer to what the original designer had in mind. Could it be that the garden of our life sometimes needs a radical rearrangement by the mighty wind of God's Spirit?

I see a parallel between the hurricanes of 2004 and the wind of God's Spirit.

God's Spirit is the wind of change, and change is not always welcome in our life. In the presence of God's Spirit, some things in our life will have to be torn down. When the wind of the Spirit blows, some things in our life will need to be severely pruned back. When the fiery tongues of God's presence alight on us, we will see the need for repentance and renewal.

All of this can be very perplexing and down right annoying. We don't want change. We don't want to lose the comfort and convenience of what we know and love. We don't want to alter who we are and how we are.

But, sometimes the Spirit of God drags us kicking and screaming into a new way of life and a new way of thinking. Sometimes the wind of the Spirit blows down those sacred cows in our life and enables us to conceive of a greater hope.

Each year at this time I think about those who are graduating from high school or college. It is exciting, and yet, it is also a bit intimidating as well.

I remember what a big time of transition that was for me. All that I knew and loved would soon be left behind. I would travel from the cool mountains of West Virginia to the dry plains of central Texas to attend school.

I wanted to go, and in the end it proved to be the best decision. But, it sure was hard to leave everything that I knew and loved in order to follow the call of the future. There have been many calls and moves since that time. Often the change has been difficult. And yet, as I look back upon my life, I can see that the wind of God's Spirit was at work in those sometimes-painful changes.

LEARNING A NEW LANGUAGE

So what changes might the Spirit be making in our life today? What changes might the Spirit be making in our church today?

First, I think the Spirit of God is forever in the business of teaching His disciples a new language. In our lesson for today the wind of the Spirit miraculously enabled the disciples to preach the gospel in a foreign tongue. There were Jews from all over the ancient world and each one heard the gospel preached in their native tongue.

Now this doesn't necessarily mean that we will get to skip language lab in high school or college. It doesn't necessarily mean that we will, with no effort on our own, be able to speak a foreign tongue. But, I do think this miracle of translation teaches an important lesson about what is important in God's kingdom.

God desires that the whole world hear the gospel message, and thus the work of the Spirit is still primarily the proclamation of the gospel. The work of the Spirit is the job of making the gospel understandable to all the people of the modern world.

Some of the fastest growing churches in our country are based upon this model. They have asked, "How can we communicate the gospel to those who have never been in church before?" And then they have based their entire church program upon the answer to that question. Many things had to change in these churches, and some people were not happy about the changes.

But, in the end, some of these churches have developed a vital and more effective ministry because they have dared to be open to the wind of the

Spirit. The Spirit of God is about communicating God's message in a way that makes sense to an ever-increasing number of people. How can we do that?

I think that's an important question for us to ask as a church. How could we better communicate the gospel to the people who are in Kissimmee? How might we change what we do in order to make worship more understandable for people who are from a different culture? How might we change what we do to welcome families in which church going has not been a part of the routine?

A NEW VISION

According to our passage for today, the life-changing breeze of the Spirit begins with a new vision, a vision that is shared by young and old, rich and poor. Peter told those who scoffed,

"These people aren't drunk on new wine. They're filled with the Spirit. They're empowered by a new, godly way of looking at things.

It's a fulfillment of what God said through the prophet Joel, 'I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams. Even upon my slaves, both men and women, in those days I will pour out my Spirit; and they shall prophesy.'"

I've heard a lot of excuses in my life as to why something can't be done. But, many of the excuses can be put into three categories, "I'm too young. I'm too old. I'm not qualified."

This passage addresses all three of those excuses. Are you young? God's Spirit says that you're not too young to have a vision of truth. Are you old? The Spirit says that you're not too old to dream about the future. Do you think of yourself as weak and unimportant? The Spirit says that even unlearned and untrained slaves can make an important contribution in the coming kingdom.

In the ancient world, these three groups, the young, the old and the slaves were seen as unimportant and unwanted, but in God's kingdom they are filled with the Spirit.

You'll notice that those first witnesses to the power of the Spirit stumbled over this surprising fact.

They couldn't believe that the power of God's Spirit was poured out on those that were from a lower class

They said, "These guys are Galileans. How did they learn to speak our language? We know they haven't been to school. It's all very confusing. This doesn't fit with all that we thought we knew."

I think that we too are often surprised and more than a little disturbed when the wind of the Spirit blows our way. The message of the Spirit doesn't fit with what we thought we knew. There is always an aspect of God's plan for our lives that is greater and higher than we could ever imagine on our own.

WORD AND SPIRIT

But, there does seem to be some common denominators in how the Spirit works. The Spirit pulls people together instead of tearing them apart. The Spirit opens up new vistas of hope instead of settling down into the ways of the past. The Spirit helps us understand and love those who are different from us.

And the Spirit helps us understand the Word of God in new and fresh ways. The Word of God is applied to our situation with power. We've already noted how this happened at Pentecost. Peter, inspired by the Spirit, took the words of the Old Testament prophet Joel and used them to help the crowd understand what was going on that day.

When you look back on the history of the church, you see that this has often been the formula for great change. The great reformers of the church such as Calvin, Luther and Wesley were changed when the wind of the Spirit opened up the meaning of the Bible to them. In the case of those three, it was the message of grace found in Paul's letter to the Romans that turned their lives upside down and eventually changed the direction of Western civilization.

And that message, empowered by the Spirit can change our lives as well. It's in our lesson for today in a very simple form. Peter told the crowd on that first Pentecost, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved." (Acts 2:21)

REPENTANCE AND RENEWAL

Peter goes on to define salvation in the verses that we didn't read. Peter said that the salvation of God is embodied in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus.

That wasn't very good news for those who first heard this message. You see, many in that crowd who witnessed the power of Pentecost had also been in the crowd that called for the crucifixion of Jesus. Peter said as much when he referred to Jesus as the one "whom you crucified." (Acts 2:36)

The Scripture tells us that they were "cut to the quick" when they heard this. (Acts 2:37, Msg.) They were guilty as charged and for one awful moment they didn't know what to do or where to turn. Peter gave them the answer. "Repent. Turn away from your sin and turn toward Jesus. You will be forgiven and not only you, but your children and many others as well." (Acts 2:39)

The Bible tells us that about 3,000 took Peter up on God's offer of forgiveness that day. Three thousand were baptized and began to live a new life based upon that grace and forgiveness. They were filled with the "new wine" of the Spirit and the hope of life eternal.

Repentance and renewal in response to God's Word and Spirit should be a part of every believer's life. It's a cycle that keeps our faith new and fresh. It's a strong drink that makes us feel alive and happy.

FIRE IS NECESSARY

We now know that forest fires are not totally bad. Fires play an important role in nature. They can clear the ground of accumulating leaves, branches and needles, making room for needed new growth. Indeed, we have found that if we don't let some fires burn, we create a much more dangerous wildfire situation later on.

On the other hand, we have seen in recent years that it is painful for us to let nature take her course.

Some of you remember when the fires burned in Yellowstone. We wondered if perhaps we were making a big mistake.

But, in the past few years we have seen how the ecosystem in Yellowstone is recovering nicely, that the fire was a necessary part of God's creation.

I think there is a spiritual lesson for us in this.

The fire of God's Word and Spirit must burn in our lives from time to time in order to clear out the debris that is becoming dangerous. It's only through this sometimes painful process that new life can appear.

And all of us here today could stand to go through this process. All our lives are filled with the underbrush of guilt and regret.

We need the purifying fire of God's Spirit.
We need to throw out our old, brittle wineskins so that we can fill our lives with the new wine of God's Spirit.

May God give us the courage and the faith to embrace the life changing Spirit who comes to us even today.

May the fire of God's Spirit burn away the chaff in our life.

May the wind of God's Spirit open up a new vista of grace and love.

Amen.

FIRST PRESBYTERIAN