

**A Mighty Wind
Pentecost, Year B**

Acts 2:1-8, 14-17, Romans 8:22-27, John 15:26-27; 16b-15

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What are some of your favorite Bible verses?

Psalm 23:1-4—"The Lord is my Shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures: he leads me beside still waters; he restores my soul..."

Revelation 21:4—"He will wipe away every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and pain will be no more."

John 3:16—"For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son..."

One woman with a great sense of humor held up a large white placard at a football game with John 4:17—"I have no husband."

Among my favorite verses is 1 John 4:16—"God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God in them."

For me, that pretty much sums up the gospel.

But the first two verses of today's gospel passage are equally compelling; they not only express the nature of God, as understood by the Church, but also our role as Christians:

Jesus, on the eve of his death, tells his disciples, "When the Advocate comes—the Spirit of truth—whom I will send to you from the Father...he will testify on my behalf. You *also* are to testify..." (John 15:26-27).

As is often the case with John, his words are chock-full; there's a lot of meat on the bones of these two little verses.

John gives the impression that Jesus, the Father and the Spirit are all members of the same team; it's as though the three are running a relay race: the Father takes the first lap then passes the baton to Jesus, who takes the second lap then passes the baton to the Spirit.

And the Spirit, as we read in today's passage from Acts, comes roaring in and passes the baton to Jesus' followers—first, to his original disciples, then on down through the ages to us *modern-day* disciples. The Spirit goes *with* us, to be sure, but the baton is in our hands.

But, Lord, we are tired...

Remember Lucille Ball's "commercial" for the fictitious energy supplement, Vitameatavegamin?

Hello friends, I'm your Vitameatavegamin girl.
Are you tired, run-down, listless?
Do you poop out at parties?
Are you unpopular?
The answer to all your problems is in this little bottle:
Vitameatavegamin.

After multiple spoonfuls, Lucy is not only *less* energized but lethargic; clearly, vitamins, meat, vegetables and minerals aren't the only ingredients:

Do you pop out at parties? Are you un-poop-u-lar? Well, are you?
The answer to all your problems is in this bittle lottle. It's so tasty, too! It's just like candy!
Honest!
So, everybody go and get a bottle of... this stuff...

No energy supplement, especially not one containing 23% alcohol, like the spurious Vitameatavegamin, is going to give us energy in our spiritual walk.

For that, we need the community of faith and the power of the Spirit.

On the day of Pentecost, when Jesus' original disciples were "*all together in one place*" (Acts 2:1), the Holy Spirit came upon them "like the rush of a *violent* wind and filled the *entire* house where they were sitting" (Acts 2:2).

Two words grab my attention in this Acts passage: *violent* and *entire*.

All the disciples are together in one place when the Spirit rips through the house; this is no private encounter with the still, small voice of God; this is a roaring wind that sweeps through them and likely knocks the breath out of them before filling them up and empowering them to speak in ways they've never spoken before (Acts 2:4).

That first Pentecost people from every nation were visiting Jerusalem, each with their own languages and dialects. Yet somehow they were able to hear the disciples speaking in their own native languages.

In some churches, people will be so moved by the Spirit that they'll begin to speak in tongues or languages that no one can understand, but that's not really what's happening in this story. In today's story, the disciples speak in their own language but are heard in the *native* languages of all the foreigners who've traveled to Jerusalem.

That would be like someone walking in here and speaking Swahili and our hearing English words.

My Middle Eastern grandmother, before she moved to the States in the early 80's, flew to visit us each year from Tehran. On one plane trip, she was conversing in her heavily-accented English with an American who asked her what language she spoke. "French," she replied, to which her seatmate delightedly exclaimed, "I understand your French!" she had been speaking English!

My grandmother never ceased to delight in telling the story of the American who sincerely believed she had understood her seatmate's "French."

Understandably, the Jerusalem crowd is amazed and astonished by the disciples "ability" to speak their languages. "How is it that we understand, each of us, in our own native language?"

"What does this mean?" some ask. Others sneer and say, "They are filled with new wine."

That must've been some wine.

Whether you believe in the literal interpretation of the story—that tongues as of fire rested on the disciples' heads, and that they were heard speaking in languages they didn't know—or whether you see it as a metaphor, the message is the same: the Holy Spirit is powerful.

And yet, we don't always, or even often, feel the power of the Spirit: perhaps a gentle breeze every so often but rarely a strong gust. And when we do experience a gale wind, we don't necessarily feel empowered but overwhelmed. Alexandra Fuller, writing of sailing, provides an appropriate metaphor:

"Sometimes [when I sail] the wind lulls and there is nothing to do but wait it out in the tiny patch of shade afforded by the sail"—anyone feel like they're waiting it out in a tiny patch of shade?

“And sometimes the wind gets [so] gusty and unpredictable [that no matter] what line I pull things don’t make sense, and the boat seems to get a mind of her own”—anyone feel like that?

“*But* there is a feeling of emancipation, too”ⁱ (258).

A feeling of emancipation. Huh. I wouldn’t have expressed it that way.

The Spirit comes in like a violent wind when things need to get started or stirred up or changed, and there’s something freeing in that: in letting the Spirit take you where she will, in surrendering.

But the Spirit doesn’t remain in that state or the whole house would collapse; there is stillness, too, sometimes so much so that you’d like a little more lull.

With the Spirit, there’s room for both stillness and stirrin and everything in between..

The gospel tells us the disciples were sitting when the Spirit came; they were sitting, not moving about frenzied and frenetic.

Journalist Lonnae O’Neal writes of the importance of being still:

Sitting in my living-room armchair every day, I sometimes remind myself of my late grandmother who...used to sit on the corner of an end table so she could look out the front screen door and see the comings and goings all down her street. A watchful stillness.

We often discount the need for contemplative spaces. As if we don’t need the still to make sense of frenzy.

The *rush!rush!now!* is one of the persistent hardships of modern life, says Charlie Dean, pastor of Imago Dei Church in Peoria, Ill. “The littlest thing sends us into a tailspin,” he says. “As a culture, we thrive on how little sleep we can get, how much stuff we can pack in our day, and we have no space around the margins.”

Dean writes a blog on the “spirituality of everything.” In January, as he was helping to build a house, leading his church and being a dad to four sons, he found himself at a Panera Bread feeling a spiritual deficit. He wrote:

“It’s so easy to wish life by. It’s easy to think about how things will someday be better and somehow life slips away. This is why I’ve become quite the evangelist for silence and solitude. I absolutely need time and space to just be still . . . to think about my life and who

[I] am and what I'm about and why I'm here and which direction I'm going. And so here, tonight in the cafe, for 4 minutes, I listened to a great song, and I was still."

I know it's the truth, though sometimes I worry that if I power down, I won't be able to power back up. But I have faith in old wisdom.

There's a psalm that commands "be still." And there's a restoration, a peaceability in stillness, that sometimes shows up as settling into yourself and becoming one with your surroundings. And with your armchair. I don't think there's a verse for that. It's just something my grandmother taught me. (O'Neal, Lonnae. "The Church of the Righteous Armchair Will Set You Free."

Returning to the topic of favorite Bible verses: Matthew 14:22-33. Here we read of a violent wind and a windless sea, of overwhelmed disciples and the divine presence.

The disciples are in a boat, battered by the waves, far from the land, and after an agonizing night wondering if they're going to make it, Jesus comes walking toward them on the sea. "Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid." Jesus gets into the boat with them, and the wind become a gentle breeze, the waves still.

Our faith seems to be on a pendulum between times of upheaval and of calm, of speaking up and of staying quiet, of making sense and of feeling confused. The point is to stay connected to the body of Christ and, with each other and the Holy Spirit, to carry the baton forward.

ⁱ Fuller, Alexandra. *Leaving Before the Rains Come*. Penguin Press, New York. 2015)