

**Scripture Lesson:** Acts 2:1-18

Pew Bible N.T. pg. 111

<sup>1</sup>When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. <sup>2</sup>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. <sup>3</sup>Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. <sup>4</sup>All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability. <sup>5</sup>Now there were devout Jews from every people under heaven living in Jerusalem. <sup>6</sup>And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each. <sup>7</sup>Amazed and astonished, they asked, "Are not all these who are speaking Galileans?" <sup>8</sup>And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language? <sup>9</sup>Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, <sup>10</sup>Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, <sup>11</sup>Cretans and Arabs—in our own languages we hear them speaking about God's deeds of power." <sup>12</sup>All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, "What does this mean?" <sup>13</sup>But others sneered and said, "They are filled with new wine." <sup>14</sup>But Peter, standing with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed them, "Fellow Jews and all who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and listen to what I say. <sup>15</sup>Indeed, these are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only nine o'clock in the morning. <sup>16</sup>No, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel: <sup>17</sup>'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. <sup>18</sup>Even upon my slaves, both men and women, in those days I will pour out my Spirit, and they shall prophesy.

**Response to the Word**

One: This is the Word of God for the people of God.

**All: Thanks be to God!**

Acts 2:1-18

05/24/2026 – Saginaw First U.M.C.

"Violent Wind"

Rev. Amy Terhune

It may interest you to know that this weekend, we celebrate 3 different holidays. That's right – THREE. This is Memorial Day weekend, when we pause to remember those who have given their lives in service to the armed forces of the United States. In an age when Christian Nationalism seems to be seeping into the church to the point where it's becoming toxic in some instances, there are voices out there who suggest we should not even mention Memorial Day. But given that thousands and thousands have made the ultimate sacrifice, and some still are and have just within the last few months, it seems appropriate to me that we acknowledge their sacrifice and the grief their families are undoubtedly experiencing. I guarantee, the ones we've lost in Iran in the past few months did not send themselves to war. So we remember.

Today is also Pentecost, sometimes called the birthday of the church, the day the Holy Spirit was poured out on God's people to give them strength and courage to advance Christ's mission to build the Kingdom of God on earth. More on that in moment.

Finally, in Methodist circles around the world, today is Aldersgate Sunday. It was on this very day – May 24 – 288 years ago, which would be 1738 (for those who don't feel like doing math today), that John Wesley recorded in his journal reflections from his 5:00am scripture study, his afternoon

worship at St. Paul's, and how in prayer, he felt buffeted by temptation on all sides. But in reflecting on his day, he writes words that have become famous to Methodists:

“In the evening, I went very unwillingly to a society in Aldersgate Street, where one was reading Luther's Preface to the Epistle to the Romans. About a quarter before nine, while he was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone, for salvation; and an assurance was given me that He had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death.”

Some modern scholars think we put too much emphasis on this passage from Wesley's journal, but across the centuries, many have found his description of transformation resonates with personal experience. It's certainly true for me. Having been born and raised in the church, I'd heard the message of salvation a hundred times. But one day in my teens, something happened. The message broke through. It ceased to be merely teaching from my parents and Sunday School teachers. It touched me personally. I have often described it as a lightbulb suddenly turning on in my head, in that I made a leap from the faith of parents to accepting Jesus as the Lord of my own life – that God was moving and working in and through me! But it wasn't really an intellectual exercise. My heart was strangely, inexplicably, unaccountably warmed. Something flamed up in me, and like the disciples on the road from Emmaus, when the pieces clicked into place, I couldn't help but realize that something inside of me had been ignited and was burning to find expression beyond me. I understand now what I didn't then – that the Holy Spirit has a way of filling gaps and fostering connections within us to bring the truth of God's grace alive within us.

But what never ceases to move me deeply is that what the Holy Spirit does within us, it also does among us – filling gaps and making connections that enable us to find one another, to see each other's gifts and graces, to celebrate each other's full personhood, and to share the work of extending God's love beyond an inward experience to a living reality in relationships and practice in the world. Our world likes to highlight our divisions and our conflicts. And there are plenty to highlight. I don't want to minimize the reality of the dangers we face in these days.

But I refuse to live without hope. My faith tells me that the Spirit works behind the scenes, in hearts, in relationships, in the world. Long before there is a flood of revival, the Spirit moves beneath the surface, wedging open slightly the cracks that allow groundwater to surge upwards, sometimes, weeks, months, years, decades in advance. I know that God sees the long view – a view much longer than I can ever hope to see. But having known God's faithfulness, care, and presence in my own dark nights of the soul, I trust God with the dark nights of our collective soul. I trust God to move, not only to redeem broken hearts and individual lives, but to redeem the broken systems and social structures in which we all live.

The disciples found that same trust. There they were, gathered in Jerusalem in the upper room – the upper room where Jesus shared his last meal with his disciples. The upper room where they hid out in fear after Jesus was crucified. The upper room where Thomas and other disciples first encounter Jesus alive after the resurrection. And it's in that upper room that Jesus has continued to meet with them for 40 days, reminding them of all his teachings and speaking together about the Kingdom of God. Then he takes them just outside Jerusalem, to the Mount of Olives where he had prayed the night he was arrested, and there, he is swept up to heaven in a cloud, promising them that they would receive power from the Holy Spirit. They return to Jerusalem, to that same upper room, and they pray and study and plan. And the Spirit comes to that upper room – to a group that was still directionless, confused, and overwhelmed. And the Spirit gives them purpose, vision, unity, power, and courage to take the message out, beyond that upper room.

Not long ago, I happened upon an interesting fact: "...there are some 7,000 languages in the world today and communication researchers believe that most of them share one common word. This one word has the same meaning in every language, and it has a similar pronunciation in almost every language. What is the "universal" word I'm talking about? Anyone want to take a guess? (*allow for feedback*) Good Guesses! That universal word that languages share is: "Huh?"

"N.J. Enfield is a professor of linguistics at the University of Sydney in Australia. He and his colleagues studied dozens of languages from dozens of different language family groups, and they came up with the same conclusion: "Huh?" is the easiest and fastest sound to make when we don't understand something said in a conversation. Conversations usually move quickly, and it takes less than a second to say "Huh?" It is also a sound that can be made when the tongue and mouth are in a relaxed position, so it doesn't require much effort. This is universally understood to mean, "Wait a minute; I didn't understand you." That one little word encourages clarity and better communication.

"In an article for *American Scientist* magazine, Enfield writes, ". . . Huh? does not stand for universal confusion. It stands for universal cooperation. It shows that there is a global need, and willingness, to pause a conversation and sort out a communication problem as it occurs." [from "Huh? Is That a Universal Word?" by N.J. Enfield, *American Scientist*, May-June 2019, Volume 107, Number 3, p. 178 at <https://www.americanscientist.org/article/huh-is-that-a-universal-word>; as used, along with 3 preceding ¶s, in "Sharing God's Vision" by King Duncan and Andrea Akers, [www.Sermons.com](http://www.Sermons.com).]

And communication problems occur all the time. I'm reminded of "...two New Yorkers who were driving in the state of Louisiana when they entered the town of Natchitoches, which I may or may not be pronouncing correctly. But they didn't know how to pronounce it either, and so they immediately began discussing with one another how to say the town's name correctly. The discussion escalated into an argument and became rather heated. As it was nearing lunchtime, they decided to stop and eat at some fast-food place there in town. Standing at the counter, one of them thought he would settle the argument before ordering. So he said to the person waiting on them: "Would you help settle a disagreement between us? Would you please pronounce where we are, very slowly and very clearly?" Whereupon the young woman behind the counter said to the two men: "Taaa – Coooo Belllllll..." [from "Trickle Charge" by Bill Ritter, [www.Sermons.com](http://www.Sermons.com).] Wait! Huh? Well okay, but I still don't know if I'm pronouncing Natchitoches correctly.

On that first Pentecost, a message was offered to all those who utter "huh?" when people start talking religion. It was a simple message that God speaks your language. And moreover, that God is moving and there is cause for hope: that God's love and grace is not for one people or one place but for all people in every place; that's God's power can change your life and your corner of the world, but it can also change the entire world. And it did. And it does. And it will.

One of the words that fascinates me in this account of the Spirit's arrival in Acts is how Luke describes it. Luke, by the way, wrote his gospel, and then continues the story in the book of Acts to tell us how the early church came to be. In our lesson today, he describes the Holy Spirit as a rush of violent wind. When I hear the word violent, I normally think of something destructive, something that hurts and harms. Two years back, Madeline, Lexi, and I traveled to Greenfield, Iowa with the United Methodist Volunteers in Mission youth team to do recovery work there after Greenfield was devastated by a tornado that ripped through the town. When I think of violent wind, those images from Greenfield are indelibly stamped in my brain. A few years before that, I took a team to New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina. Those images also live in my mind. Hurricanes. Tornados. That's violent wind. I'll confess that I'm not entirely comfortable using the term violent to describe the work of the Holy Spirit.

But when I did some research, I found that the Greek word there is βίαιος (bee-ah-yos). [See Strong's Concordance [https://biblehub.com/greek/bias\\_970.htm](https://biblehub.com/greek/bias_970.htm) and [https://biblehub.com/greek/biaias\\_972.htm](https://biblehub.com/greek/biaias_972.htm).] It's

only used in Acts – a couple of times to describe what the Pharisees feared from the crowd if they persecuted Peter or Paul, and once to describe what the waves do to Paul's ship after a shipwreck leaves him stranded. And here, to describe the wind of the Spirit. In the Greek, it refers to force, or strength. The wind of the Spirit blew through mightily, with enormous power. To be sure, the Spirit may, at times, be destructive. It blows apart our prejudice, our selfishness, our enmity, hostility, rancor, and arrogance. It rips our apathy to shreds. It lays waste to what is not of God in us if we open ourselves to its power. The Spirit will challenge us, particularly if we're too comfortable. But in this case, it sweeps on the scene with force and power, giving to the disciples what they need to withstand the pressure and advance the gospel in a hostile world. And so it does for us.

At Pentecost, we toss around a lot of images. Language, fire, wind. Because it's not easy to talk about what the Spirit does. We see faith happen – we see it transform from an idea to a way of life, but how do you talk about it? It burns in us like fire, warming us, energizing us, empowering us. It blows through us like wind, lifting us, revitalizing us, carrying us beyond what we think is possible. Like language, it connects and inspires us, uniting us around vision and shared values. But all of these are descriptors, channels or avenues, images that allow us to open our hearts to the warming, the stirring, the message of the Spirit that's really beyond description.

And the message, friends, is that there is cause for hope. There is cause for faith. We do not have to live life exhausted and burnt out, at the razor edges of reason and sanity. We're meant for more. And that's where the Spirit really goes to work. But it's not easy. The Spirit is not something we control, harness or regulate. We can't manipulate or manage the Spirit's movement. The Spirit takes us where God sends, and that's not necessarily where we'd choose. Into a lion's den or fiery furnace or a hostile throne room. Into exile, into wilderness, into desert wanderings. Martin Luther didn't want to face down the might of the Holy Roman Empire. John Wesley didn't want to preach on tombstones in a cemetery or ride a horse 250,000 miles crisscrossing England for decades. Martin Luther King didn't want to face down fire hoses, police dogs, and burning crosses. But when the Spirit moves, we either choose to step out in faith and let it carry us, or we waste away at the margins of despair. The only promise we're given is this: we will never have to go it alone and we will never be asked to be anything other than our authentic self. We bring our broken selves, our secret sins, our difficult relationships, our worn-out spirits, our fearful hearts, our bewildered minds, and that little sliver of hope that just wants to make something in this world a little better for someone else, and the Holy Spirit can work with all of that. The Spirit moves. It's ready and waiting, here and rearing to go. It draws us together, it draws us to God, it draws us to the streets.

In the mid 2000s, prolific writer and church growth consultant Lyle E. Schaller made one of his last public appearances on a panel discussion group. By then, he was long retired, but remained one of the most respected founders in the field of church growth and modern evangelism. At that panel discussion, an audience member said to him, "I know that youth and young adults are the hope of the United Methodist Church, so how do we...?" And Schaller interrupted the questioner before they could even finish the question. He said, "Stop right there. That is heresy, plain and simple. The hope of the United Methodist Church is, and always has been, the Holy Spirit." And it still is. Amen and Amen.