

Numbers 11:24-30, Psalm 104:24-34, 35b, Acts 2:1-21, John 7:37-39

### **INTRO — WIND**

Well good morning, and thank you for chiming in once again to our weekly recording. Right off the bat I'll remind you to take the time to read the lessons for today, if you'd like: Numbers 11:24-30, Psalm 104:24-34, 35b, Acts 2:1-21, John 7:37-39.

Today is a special day in the church year — it's the day of Pentecost — the day in which the Holy Spirit descended upon the disciples & birthed the Christian church. Ever since that day, the Holy Spirit has been growing, sanctifying, & building up God's church throughout the world. In fact, the fastest growing church movement in the world today began April 9th, 1906 in Los Angeles with the Azusa Street Revival — it was the birth of a church movement known today as Pentecostalism. And it is charismatic and Pentecostal churches that are growing throughout the world faster than any other church today. Jesus said in John 3:8,

***“The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.”***

And that has certainly been the case with the Spirit's movement within the church for over 2000 years.

One of the more famous of Canadian novels is W.O. Mitchell's book *Who Has Seen the Wind?* about life in a small Saskatchewan town during the *Dirty 30's* — maybe some of you have read it. The story is about a boy growing up & coming to terms with the cycles of life and death, and seeing as the story takes place during the Great Depression the wind blowing across the prairies is a recurring backdrop to the story. I've heard that in the book the wind symbolizes the Holy Spirit, and that metaphor has stuck with me ever since, seeing as we are living on the prairies and are no strangers to wind.

I'm sure I've never lived in a place before as windy as Stettler, Alberta. And we're in the midst once again of a week of wind. I'll confess that I've grumbled & complained my fair share this week about

the wind — I wonder if any of you are fed up with the wind right now? And so once again, I've tried to remind myself of the metaphor of the wind as the Holy Spirit.

Well, if the Spirit of God would blow across the prairies like the wind does, we'd be in pretty good shape! But if nothing else, when the wind blows it reminds me to pray for God's Spirit to move over our land — over our community. And it's a reminder to me that God's Spirit is here in our midst, that he hasn't left us, and is in fact at work accomplishing God's work in ways that we can't predict or control — and that's good news.

### ***GOD AT WORK IN US***

Pentecost, and the power of the Holy Spirit at work in the life of the church is a wonderful theme. It's always been an intriguing theme because we all want to know the experience of God at work in us, and through us. You can chalk this up to music references from obscure bands that you've never heard of before, but there's a band called Fleet Foxes, who sing a few lines that come to mind for me:

***"I was raised up believing I was somehow unique***

***Like a snowflake distinct among snowflakes,***

***unique in each way you can see***

***And now after some thinking, I'd say I'd rather be***

***A functioning cog in some great machinery***

***servicing something beyond me" —Helplessness Blues, Fleet Foxes***

The sentiment is vague, but I think one that resonates with a lot of people — rather than being an individual who stands alone, we have a deep longing to belong to something bigger than ourselves — to know that our lives matter, and that they are being used in some way for some great purpose. We all want to know the experience of God at work in our lives, and at work through us, and that's why the Holy Spirit is so intriguing, because in the Bible he works in such remarkable ways through ordinary Christians.

### **THE FIRST PENTECOST**

It's important to note that Pentecost was a Jewish feast before it was a special day for Christians. Within Judaism it's called *Shavuot*, or sometimes the *Feast of Weeks* — 50 days after the Passover when Israel was released from bondage in Egypt in the Exodus, they found themselves at the foot of Mt. Sinai & received the Law — the Ten Commandments from God through Moses. And this event was commemorated at Pentecost — 50 days after the Passover. It was an event marked with fear & trembling because of the great cloud, & fire, & thunder shaking the mountain — an encounter with the God of the universe was a frightening thing.

In our OT lesson the Israelites are wandering through the wilderness. Moses & the 70 leaders of the people go to the Tabernacle and the Spirit of God descends on them and they all start prophesying. Meanwhile, the same thing has happened to two men who have stayed inside the Israelite camp — they begin to prophesy.

Now, the Bible is a place where people often turn to find names for their babies — names like Joshua, David, Matthew, Jonathan (my own name!) So if you're looking for names for future kids, let me recommend this passage, where the two men who prophesy are named Eldad and Medad. Eldad is actually a Spanish name, meaning *The Dad*, and Medad is ancient caveman-speech for *I'm Your Daddy!* Both great names for your kids — it's too bad I didn't come across them when we had Ben & Owen...

Eldad & Medad are prophesying & Joshua wants Moses to stop them. Whenever the Spirit shows up, people want to quench the Spirit because we don't understand it, or can't control it. And Moses responds to Joshua saying a remarkable thing:

***“Would that all the Lord’s people were prophets, that the Lord would put his Spirit on them!”***  
**—Numbers 11:29**

Well, fast-forward to the New Pentecost and that's exactly what happened.

### **A SECOND PENTECOST**

On the Day of Pentecost fire descended again from Heaven. Throughout scripture fire is a symbol of judgment. If God sends fire, that's a bad thing. Here, fire descends on the disciples but they

aren't consumed by it because now they stand in a new covenant — a new relationship with God through Jesus' death & resurrection which covers them & protects them. And instead of being consumed by God's judgment for their sinfulness, they are filled with the Holy Spirit — the Spirit who gives them new life & empowers them to boldly declare the message of salvation in Jesus.

What's the first thing Peter does after he's filled with the Spirit? He stands up and preaches about Jesus — he preaches for the rest of the chapter. And from that point on, you can't shut him up, or the rest of the disciples — they travel near & far telling everyone who will listen about the new life, the forgiveness, the joy of the story of Jesus' death & resurrection for them.

It's the birth of the church, and it's marked with speaking in tongues — all these different languages — which is a reversal of the Tower of Babel story in the OT. At the Tower of Babel God confuses the people by making them speak different languages, because they were determined to climb their way up to God. But here, the nations of the world are brought back together again — the ability to speak Chinese, or Latvian, or whatever is given to the church so that there will now be no boundaries between peoples. Because we need not climb our way up to God, but God has instead descended to us

At the first Pentecost the Law was given to God's people and the covenant was established with them. Here at the second Pentecost the Spirit is given to God's people and a new covenant is established. What this means is that God's church now lives not by a series of rules — of do's and don'ts — in order to gain our holiness & standing before God. We live instead by his Spirit, in a freedom that allows us to live a life of love, not a life of law. Paul says,

“There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death.” —Romans 8:1-2

## **WATER**

Jesus says in our Gospel lesson,

***“If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, ‘Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.’” —John 7:37-38***

And John adds that when Jesus is talking about rivers of living water, he's talking about the Holy Spirit. Our Psalm today talks about God's creative agency — he's made all of the creatures of the earth and in the sea, and he sustains their very lives. And all of this is done by God's Spirit:

***“When you send forth your Spirit, they are created,  
and you renew the face of the earth.” —Psalm 104:30***

God's Spirit is like the waters that nourish us & keep us alive.

There's a river delta in southern Africa in the middle of the Kalahari Desert called the Okavango River Delta. It's in Botswana & is a UNESCO World Heritage Site. One of the driest places on earth, but when rain waters flood into the delta they transform it into a Garden of Eden full of plant and animal life. Water has an incredible ability to transform even the driest of places — bringing vitality, variety, and abundance.

Do you ever feel like your life has become dry, or a desert? That your spiritual life is stagnant, or nonexistent? That not a blade of grass could grow there, let alone produce fruitfulness for God? That's all of us — often on our best days, and that's why we need the Holy Spirit within us to work a miracle. But there's good news here — the Holy Spirit is like the rain waters that water the Okavango. The Holy Spirit is in the business of bringing life & vitality to human hearts — within us, within our families, within our neighbours. The Holy Spirit is in the business of working miracles!

***“When you send forth your Spirit, they are created,  
and you renew the face of the earth.” —Psalm 104:30***

And you renew us too — and you renew your church.

I don't know where the Spirit of God will blow — I can't predict it. But let's pray, let's plead with God that the Holy Spirit will blow through us, through our church, through this community, so that the name of Jesus will be lifted up in the hearts of this town. Amen.