

**Preached by Rev. JF Hudson: 5/11/08 at Pilgrim Church**  
**Scripture: Acts 2:1-21**

*From the text:” 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. Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability. Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each.”*

**“Divine Wind”**

It was a miracle born in the wind, the wind, a prairie Pentecost.

I once thought I knew what it was to live in a windy place, a really windy place. I grew up on the coast of Massachusetts, five houses down from the beach in Quincy. I was a sailor as a boy, a kite flyer, lived through many northeasters whipping waves over the seawall and so I thought I knew what it was like to live with the blowing of the wind. But then one summer thirteen years ago I traveled for the first time to the Great Plains of America, to South Dakota, and lived for one week on the Cheyenne River Sioux Reservation along with 3,200 other volunteers from all around the world. We were all called together by God for one incredible and miraculous task: to construct thirty-two Habitat for Humanity homes in one frenetic and unbelievable blitz-building week, just seven days, with former President Jimmy Carter as our leader. On Sunday morning we started with thirty-two foundation holes in the ground. By the following Saturday afternoon there were thirty two brand new homes, where once there was a collection of weather-worn shacks on a dusty and windswept empty lot.

But back to that miraculous wind. For there is a New England wind: the breeze that flaps the flag on the front porch, gently moves the trees on a hot August afternoon, whips a golf flag on a spring morning and then there is wind, the wind of the plains. Have you ever experienced it? In the Dakotas the wind blows constantly and I mean all the time. Morning, noon, night, no let up. It blows in the dark and blows in the light. The wind makes the dirt and dust get in your ears and your eyes and your throat. I remember remarking to my farmer host how darn windy it was and he said, “Well John that wind starts at the Rockies and has nothing to stop it and nowhere to go but due east until it gets to the Appalachians.”

And so we built in the wind, built as the breezes whisked away our building supplies if we failed to nail everything down, built one black sky dominated afternoon when an eighty-mile per hour violent thunderstorm whipped through the worksite. We survived the wind and in a way the wind united all of us as we constructed and hammered and dug and built. The windy image I’ll never forget was one from the final day when President Carter went around to each new family in their homes and presented them with a Bible. After he left our group of 100 or so volunteers that had worked on our individual home gathered for a final blessing ceremony as the wind whistled outside.

And this was our worship team: a Boston Yankee Congregational minister (me), a conservative Southern Baptist layman from Oklahoma City, a Roman Catholic nun from

the south side of Chicago, a lesbian rabbi from liberal San Francisco and a Sioux Indian medicine man. Sounds like a punch line for a joke, huh?

But we prayed in Hebrew and Lakota. The shaman lit a smoke pot and holy smoke filled the home. Our Okie led us in singing “Amazing Grace” and then the nun prayed the Lord’s prayer as a final benediction. As we worshipped our common God and dedicated that home born in the wind I thought of what a miracle it was how disparate, diverse, and improbable was our rag-tag band of God’s builders.

Think of all the theological and political debates we could have had that week: the arguments about doctrine, the disagreements about dogma but I believe the wind, God’s wind of love, God’s miraculous wind of unity, kept us together, reminded us that when God creates the foundation in a community, anything is possible, everything is possible.

A miracle born in the wind, the wind, a Prairie Pentecost. Not unlike the miracle born in the wind at Pentecost twenty centuries ago in Jerusalem. It is now fifty days since Jesus left the earth. We’re told the apostles had gathered together in prayer “And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind....All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability. Now there were devout Jews from every nation....And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each.”

That’s the windy Pentecost miracle: each spoke in a foreign tongue: Hebrew, Chaldean, Aramaic yet each heard the other in their own tongue. As one commentator writes, “It was a great day for multiculturalism...the Tower of Babel turned upside-down....Although bound by a common religious past, their languages and dialects were as diverse as those heard at Ellis Island in the early 1900s.”

A miracle born in the wind. Many languages, many cultures, many races, many colors of faces: black and brown and yellow and tan; many customs and yet—on that Pentecost morning they were all as one, one people of God, one brand new church, one radical spiritual movement born in a Divine wind.

Think of all the theological and political debates that Jewish United Nations could have had: the arguments about doctrine, disagreements about dogma but the wind, God’s wind of love, God’s miraculous wind of unity, kept them together, reminded them and us again that when God creates the foundation in a community, anything is possible, everything is possible when we know, affirm, believe, and live as one human family, one human community, one.

One. Born in the wind. But my friends just as the wind can unite so can an ill wind blow us apart too. For many weeks now the United Church of Christ has been swept up in and at the center of a windy and nasty and divisive nationwide debate about church, race, religion and Presidential election year politics. As I’ve witnessed the fall out from this often violent discussion what has been missing for me, whether preached from the pulpit or declared by pundits or politicians is someone, anyone to declare this one ultimate truth: that God always, always seeks to bring us together, in love and mutual respect and tender care. That the spirit of God is one of love finally, not hate; up-building not condemnation; diversity not divisiveness; community, not separation along humanly-created divides or race or faith or party or politics.

The Pentecost miracle is that the church created that day 2,000 years ago was a spiritual movement unlike any born before or since in the history of the world. The Spirit

of God that descended from heaven in a violent wind was for all the people gathered there that day, all the people: every last one. The faith that breathed that windy morning was not local but global; didn't speak one language but instead many languages; was not tribal or narrow or chauvinistic but was instead universal. Wasn't for just one skin color but many hues, a rainbow. Wasn't merely for the rich but also the poor, not just the straight but also the gay, not just one nation but all nations.

And what has saddened me most as our nation's voracious 24/7 media frenzy and cycle has churned up so much hot air is that right now in 2008 our world, our nation has so many issues we need to face together, together: poverty, the environment, a war, the economy. But God knows God cannot bring us together as a Pentecost people to tackle these huge challenges unless we finally see ourselves as united by a passion for the common good, for us and not just me, for we and thee and not merely "I", for all humanity and not just our own little interest group. Pentecost reminds us that the spirit of God is always, finally, completely about working together.

One final note related to Mother's Day which coincides with Pentecost. The Greek verb for wind is pneo and is feminine, feminine. The Hebrew verb for wind, ruah, the wind in the Creation story that creates the world from the waters of chaos, it too is feminine. The feminine, even maternal motherly spirit of God: always uniting, never dividing, creating life out of darkness, creating a human family out of diversity. That's how Moms work. That's mother God's dream too: one family, all around one common table, all trying our best to share our one common and fragile world.

A miracle born of the wind; or chaos swept up in a violent windstorm. Blown together. Blown apart. Our world, our nation, our town, our families, our church all need to remember just this one Pentecost hope and truth: we may speak many languages but only one language matters to our unifying God and that is the language of love. Happy Pentecost. Happy Mother's Day!

Let all the people say in One Voice, "Amen!"