

May 23, 2010 – Rev. Anne E. Hodges-Copples [PDF] (Acts 2:1-21; Romans 8:14-17; John 14:8-17)

So I have been thinking about wind a lot lately. I've been thinking about the power of wind and I've been thinking particularly about how I hope one day that it is the power of wind that is across the coast of North Carolina and not the power of oil drills and oil rigs. I've been thinking a lot about the power that can renew and sustain our world and maybe save us from a reliance upon certain other kinds of powers that seem to deplete us and addict us and fool us into false senses of comfort and in the end perhaps even betray our world. I've been thinking about wind, but you know there's a problem with wind. It's not very predictable. Kind of like the sun on a Sunday you want to have a church picnic. We certainly will not complain about rain. We've been humbled by various losses. But it's just so hard when we make our plans and then when those plans go array and the winds blows where it will and we are reminded perhaps like a good sailor that we can motor along under our own power but it is oh, much more satisfying and such a greater adventure to wait for that wind, to put up our sails and to use that wind to take us on wonderful and marvelous adventures. But sometimes we have to wait for the wind. And we're going to wait for some of our scientists to figure out how to make sure all those renewable resources can somehow be put into good cooperation which is I hope what my son Daniel is working on right now.

The disciples had to wait. Those apostles who gathered on Pentecost -- it's a Jewish Hebrew feast of Pentecost -- they were gathered together because that's what Jesus, the risen Lord, told them to do and wait. The risen Lord, right before his ascension, told his followers, "Yes, I need to leave you. But another is coming. The Advocate, the Holy Comforter, the Spirit of Truth. You are not abandoned, but I need to leave." Parenthetically, in case you missed the Feast of Ascension, Jesus did not lift off from earth to go live on a planet behind the moon, all right? Jesus, our risen Lord, returned to a dimension of reality, an existence that we cannot see with our eyes, but we know in our hearts. Just as the wind we cannot see, just as love we cannot see, we can know things can be real and yet somehow beyond our touch. Jesus ascended into heaven -- that's the language of scripture. Jesus disappeared in bodily form so that we might know the power of God in our own form in our lives. "I will send to you a Holy Comforter."

But they had to wait. They had to wait. They sat again in that upper room. Not as they had done before in fear and trembling. They sat patiently waiting. I am so bad at that. I don't know about you. But I am like, "Where is that Holy Spirit when I need her? Where is God when my prayers need to be answered right now?" They waited. Now, I don't know that they waited and knew that they were waiting for a wind, but did that wind come. That mighty power filled that room. That mighty power drew them into a collective experience of God. But interestingly, right, the tongues of flame landed on each head. It was a gift of community that came in a gift to each individual believer and they were changed. That moment, that gift of the Holy Spirit, the Advocate, the Comforter, the Power of Truth, changed them into the Church. They became community like they had never known community. And rather than staying together congratulating themselves on this wonderful experience of God, they went out -- they rushed out. And interesting, they rushed out to tell this story of salvation, of forgiveness, of healing. They rushed out and lo and behold, told the story so that it could be understood by all. The miracle of

Pentecost is the disciples, the apostles went out and spoke the story of salvation in a language that each hearer could understand.

Now, you may have thought of this and you may not, but really the Pentecost story is the story of the tower of Babel turned upside down. You remember that ancient story from Genesis. How men who all spoke the same language decided one day they would build themselves a fine tower. A great tower that would reach up into heaven and they would become like Gods. Well, God didn't like that. God took that pride, that hubris that they had built their lives upon and He didn't destroy the tower, He just gave them language. It's a story of the creation of language. And they could no longer understand each other and they scattered in all directions, according to Genesis. Pentecost turns it upside down. Pentecost comes and says, "You will hear the story of God's salvation in a language that you can understand. You will hear the story of salvation that will not make us homogenous and uniform and one language, but a community of diversity. A community that creates a great harmony in all its different nuances." The miracle of Pentecost is that God will find us and reach out to us with a language we can understand and that we, the followers of Jesus, must find that language.

What will your language be? We are welcoming Elise into our community and fellowship today in Holy Baptism. How perfect on the church's birthday that this becomes Elise's baptism day. I have some wishes for Elise. That she will be multi-lingual. That she will hear the story of Jesus' saving love in many languages. In the language of music, which can speak to our hearts sometimes when the preacher's words are going someplace else. She will hear the language of God's forgiveness in the actions of a godparent who shows her how to forgive a deep and grievous wound. Maybe she'll hear the language of the Gospel in those who seek justice. Maybe she'll see the embodiment of Jesus in those who go to the side of the sick, minister to the poor, feed the hungry. There are so many languages to preach the Gospel in and only use words if you have to. These are the gifts that we want from Elise, but she needs to learn about this community from the community.

It's very funny if you stop and think about it – it's a little bit sad, but Elise is probably going to move away one day. Maybe a little sooner than later. And her parents, Allison and Scott, will need to pack their bags as graduating Ph.Ds need to do and go find that next step. And yet this is the day, this is the parish, this is the doorway that Elise comes into the community. By the power of the Holy Spirit she is made our sister today and she joins us as children of God. And wherever she goes and whatever she does we will have been and remain a part of her journey by the power of the Holy Spirit. This is the great gift of the Holy Spirit that the Gospel never belongs to one of us, it is shared with all of us. This is the gift of the Holy Spirit that it binds us together, stretches us in every imaginable way and sends us forth. Elise is not going to be in this room long, but she will belong to us, to our community, always.

I always wonder why Jesus had to leave. I mean, if he was so powerful as to have a resurrected body that you could touch, that you could eat with, you could have a conversation with, why did not he stick around? And yet he said to his disciples then and now, "I am going to do greater things through the Holy Comforter, through you," through us. What will be our gifts? How will we tell in the language of our life the story of Jesus? That's a gift we have been given to each other in communion. Bring your gifts to this table. Bring your flaws to this table. Bring your

broken old selves to this table. We don't need to build a tower to heaven. Heaven has come to us in bread and wine, in community and communion. Bring everything that's odd about you and you will find out what a gift you are and that you are to this community. And then go tell somebody about it. Only use words if you have to. Amen.