

## *Tornado Spirit*

How many here have personally seen a tornado? [*Show of hands*] How many believe in them – that tornados happen, funnel clouds sweeping from the sky to touch the earth? [*Show of hands*]

PENTECOST is a great challenge of faith for us. *Christmas*: yes, we believe in Christ, this child born is the Son of God. *Easter*: yes, we believe that Christ was raised from the dead. But *Pentecost* – do we really get Pentecost: mighty wind, Holy Spirit of power making good on a promise of God to come to us, “birthday of the church?” *Pentecost?* Isn’t this Mother’s Day? Shouldn’t there be a coffee hour today? What is this about a **spiritual tornado**?

Here is how I read Acts 2: We are gathered for an old traditional holiday called Pentecost. We are praying and waiting on God to act and lead us, as Jesus told us to do. Suddenly: tornado! A tornado rips off the roof of the sanctuary! We flee to the basement. In this life-and-death moment, all of us begin talking out loud at once about our faith: the Gospel story, what God has done in the Bible and in our lives, how we have experienced God. A crowd of outsiders see the effects of the great wind and come to look. Each one hears us in the basement talking in their own language – English and Spanish, Laotian and German, Yiddish and Arabic and Chinese and Russian and Serbian and Hungarian and Swahili. And everyone who listens hears in their own language about God’s deeds of power. Amazed, they ask, “What is this, some kind of wild party?” “No,” someone replies, “this is **church**.”

Who here has seen the *effects* of a tornado? I grew up in tornado country. I have seen those ominous greenish skies, glimpsed funnel clouds, taken refuge in the basement. I have found on our farm silverware dropped from a far off city by this great wind, an envelope from 100 miles away. I have walked with a cleanup crew down a field littered with the debris of a woods blown apart and a house blown away. Who has seen the effects of a tornado’s power?

Peter explained that God had just given to believers a *Holy Spirit of power* – a tornado Spirit! An awesome Spirit has blown them away... and changed them. The *crowd* will see this tornado Spirit **in the effects it has** on Jesus’ disciples, and on the crowd itself.

The tornado Spirit **changes who we are**. We are not just the 12 disciples, not just believers who had seen the risen Christ. We are now also Medes, Parthians, Elamites, and people from Mesopotamia, Judea, Cappadocia, people from all over the world, people who have heard the Gospel and are drawn into the salvation story. “*We*” are now suddenly enlarged and expanded to include all kinds of people, including those who bow to the Roman Emperor and those who refuse to bow, those who observe our food laws and those who eat foods considered ritually unclean, those with a rather different understanding of what is moral and immoral – the tornado Spirit throws us together to work out our differences... people from what is now Iran, Turkey, Israel, drawn into the salvation story, despite the barrier of language. The Holy Spirit changes who we are.

Have you considered how that tornado Spirit works with us in this congregation? When you really get to know someone here, besides things you discover in common you will also find huge differences, fundamental obstacles to communication. We start from such different places, have encountered such disparate experiences of faith, and work out of such conflicting assumptions about life that it is a wonder we can have a conversation at all. I say to you there are dozens of people here with whom if you really got to know them, you are in deep disagreement when it comes to politics, economic viewpoint, what is considered moral, what the church should be about. Differences among us are so profound that we should not even be here together. And yet we are.

It is odd. The Scripture says Medes, Parthians, Elamites, Mesopotamians were all able to hear the Gospel despite language differences... by the power of the Holy Spirit. I know that I could say some things here that would be incomprehensible to many here, express opinions that would be misunderstood not knowing where I am coming from, urge actions that would seem to you sheer idiocy, offer testimony that would make some angry with me – truth be told, any of us could do that to the rest of us. If you were looking for a church where people are just like you, you should not be here. But the Holy Spirit has blown us together. And that tornado Spirit has lifted us above who we are individually and has changed us into God’s people, united us as followers of Jesus, made *one in the Spirit*. Pentecost: we are the evidence.

The tornado Spirit also **changes *the way we act***. Just look at the “before and after” picture of the disciples. Once “dense, timid bumbler who fled at the least sign of trouble, now they are fearless leaders who healed the sick, cast out demons, and went to jail gladly, where they sang hymns until the walls fell down.” [Barbara Brown Taylor] The Spirit changes the way we act. Here, the person with no good reason to forgive forgives her enemy. A couple’s anger and vindictiveness turns toward reconciliation. The tight-fisted miser finds himself being generous. The one who knew nothing of prayer now prays eagerly. Those who lived in fear are given ability to trust. People who lived for themselves are turned into servants of God’s love. The Spirit changes the way we act.

And the tornado Spirit **changes *the way we look at the future***. Storm clouds may brood over the horizon, and the future may appear closed, dark, forbidding. Certainly storms – some catastrophic – will blow into our lives. So too will the Spirit – tornado Spirit of God – “sudden, unmerited, irresistible new life!” [Beverly Gaventa] Pentecost! Like a powerful wind! Young people will see visions of what God’s power is doing. Old people will dream dreams of a better day when God’s promises are delivered in full. The Spirit changes the way we look at the future. “God’s reputation rests on a solemn pact that one day all will be well.” [Philip Yancey]

This is God’s gift to us – a *tornado of the Spirit* that changes who we are, how we act, and the way we see the future.

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