

"Blessings: Wind and Flame"  
May 31, 2020

Genesis 1:1-5, John 20:21-22

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### Call to Worship

When Pentecost Day arrived, they were all together in one place.

**Suddenly a sound from heaven like the howling of a fierce wind filled the entire house where they were sitting.**

They saw what seemed to be individual flames of fire alighting on each one of them.

**They were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages as the Spirit enabled them to speak.**

### Prayer of Invocation

**O Holy Spirit of God, breathe new life into our souls and blow away all that keeps us from trusting you. Come once more, Spirit of Fire, and set our hearts aflame in your service. Speak to us through your words that will be read, preached and sung. When you send forth your Spirit we are renewed.**

### The Word                      Genesis 1:1-5, John 20:21-22

When God began to create the heavens and the earth—**the earth was without shape or form, it was dark over the deep sea, and God's wind swept over the waters—**

God said, "Let there be light." And so light appeared. **God saw how good the light was. God separated the light from the darkness. God named the light Day and the darkness Night.**

There was evening and there was morning: **the first day.**

Then Jesus said to them, "Peace be with you. As the Father sent me, so I am sending you."

**Then he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit."**

### Living the Word

I believe that this summer will be a time of storytelling and a little preaching...stories of the ways we experience and share our blessings. When we tell a story we allow others to reflect and sometimes learn from our mistakes and our accomplishments. In sharing that part of ourselves we draw closer to each other as we find that our stories are not so different after all.

The Bible is a book of stories...and a little preaching...these stories give us examples (good and bad) of how earlier humans handled things in their lives. So we begin at the beginning with one of the greatest stories ever told Creation – day 1 – the wind and the light. Jumping ahead in the story to Pentecost and the coming of the Holy Spirit, today we will share stories of the wind and the flame.

The Wind: Have you ever stopped to think about the good and the bad of wind? A few weeks ago we had a lot of wind, and it was cold, too! Hard to imagine now but we had two weeks of temps during the day in the 40s and the wind was like winter. That was what caused our fire levels to go

into the danger zone. What I like is just a gentle breeze to dry my clothes on the clothes line outside. If you have a breeze they don't get as stiff and need dryer tumbling before folding. Babies don't need scratchy diapers...

A week ago, Saturday, would have been good diaper drying weather. Though not so many use the cloth diapers today, thinking of the wind reminds me of clothes lines filled with a week's worth of two little boys diapers – it was a lot of work, but a labor of love and I was so proud as a young mother of what I accomplished when I saw them waving in the wind. These days I have to be content with fresh clean sheets on the line and the spring airing of the quilts.

Does anyone have another blessing of the wind to share?

What effects did the wind have on your yard last week? Did anyone notice the seeds that were dropped by plants and trees? It is nature's way of regenerating, reproducing – a need for the wind.

We have even found a way to harness some of that wind through huge turbines to generate electricity. You may not like the idea of the turbines, but we are all thankful for how easy it is to put a plug in the wall for power as conveniently as we need it.

Next, we have a 'wind' story that most of you heard about: *A deadly tornado which tore through northwest Wisconsin on May 16, 2017 left the longest damage path in the Badger State since modern records began, according to the National Weather Service.*

*The tornado that killed one person in a mobile home park near the town of Chetek was actually on the ground for 83 miles over almost an hour and a half from southeast Polk County to southwest Price County.*

So where is the blessing in a tornado or a hurricane? That takes more thought...Where is God when homes and families are being ripped apart by the wind? God is there, and when we become the hands and feet to help in the aftermath, we become the blessing.

Even in our day to day, as we give of ourselves for another, we create blessings. Think about it for a second, blessings aren't something you create for yourself; it is the things that you make happen for others. Sometimes the blessings come later as the story is retold and we prepare our lives and plan our times together accordingly.

Moving on to fire: We like heat, especially when it is 20 degrees below zero. Most of our heat comes through a flame of some sort. With summer coming and in this time of social distancing together outside... what could be more pleasant than a bonfire? Roasting Marshmallows and singing songs, laughing and just being together...taking time to just be with others and telling some stories...

Does anyone have a fire story to share?

Fire, like wind can also be a scary thing. Some of you have heard this story before: Three days before the first anniversary of my marriage to Bob, the mobile home we were living in burned. I seven months pregnant with our son Donald and I was inside when I noticed smoke.

I got out, we lost most everything, but the blessing of that event is easier to see in hindsight...Family and friends had an after fire shower just like the bridal shower of a year earlier and replaced what was lost with the same gifts as the year before; Bob's folks took us in until we could build a house and we had a new respect for life, life together, a new baby and we were grateful for what little we had as we started over again.

I believe that Donald got a little of the smoke that day as I inhaled, for when he began college at UW River Falls, he filled his evenings with fire-fighting classes through WITC. He is now the fire chief of the Town of Hayward Fire Department. He could tell us lots of fire stories, but I'll just mention two.

One was the night a number of years ago when he decided to burn down an old barn that had to go. He had reported that it was going to be a 'controlled burn' and he had a few friends on sight with a hose in case of a problem. Well, it is a long story, but I will make it short for now. That old barn had old straw and lots of old timber which made a very large and hot fire.

As the nearest sheds began to smolder as well, and the vinyl siding on the nearby house began to melt...a call had to be made "controlled burn – out of control" and two fire departments came out. Once things were back in control, there were a lot of chuckles at Donald's expense...Camaraderie forming new bonds and blessings around the fire.

The other story would be the fire of November 2014 that took the Original Famous Dave's on Hwy B, Hayward. It is hard to understand, but they believe it was started by a pop machine plugged in to the outside of the building. By the time the fire department, including Donald arrived, it was too late to do anything. The building was a complete loss.

Where is the blessing in that? Only time will tell. But not all 'wind and flames,' big fires are bad. Crex Meadows in Grantsburg WI uses fire to regenerate the land. Crex is one of the largest state owned wildlife areas in Wisconsin. This intensively managed property is home to over 270 species of birds, at least 86 species of butterflies, and 720 species of plants.

A wide variety of mammals, reptiles, amphibians, and insects also reside here. They burn off parts of their 30,000 acres in small enough portions every five years to re-create the land. They are open for anyone to drive through this area and see wildlife in their natural habitats.

Like everything, used in moderation, God's gifts of wind and fire are blessings to our lives. Each year, 50 days after Easter, the church celebrates Pentecost, the coming of the Holy Spirit.

As humans, first we knew God; then Christ Came and we understood more about God; and when Jesus was getting ready to leave this earthly life, he promised the coming of the Holy Spirit to lead and guide our lives.

The Holy Spirit is a part of God, sent just as Jesus was, to help us navigate our life journeys. The Holy Spirit can be a gentle breeze around a campfire working in our lives. You can tell which way the wind blows as to which way the smoke goes. We can stay, risking the smoke, to enjoy the wind and flame or we can move away from the flame, hide from the wind and smoke and the Spirit may pass us by.(repeat)

The more we live into the Holy Spirit, acknowledging God's presence in what is happening, the more we see the wind and flame working in our lives and the lives of others. Then when you may not be expecting it, the Spirit will blow and blaze into your life like a wild fire out of control. Yet in those times God is even more present and the Spirit will give direction for finding control, to move you even closer to God.

We only celebrate the Pentecost for a short time, but if you keep alert within the church there are reminders. What is the symbol of the United Methodist Church? 'Cross and Flame'...You see it on both sets of the church stained glass windows.

Sometimes we need a push by the Spirit to keep us engaged with who God is calling us to be. I have been called to bring new life into this congregation. Some days the lack of attendance, and our ages and abilities begin to bring us down. Yet we know that we are called to carry on, so this church won't fade away as many are.

We have to take time to look back at where we have come and let the Spirit guide this church in new ways, while still celebrating some of the old ways. We have been blessed by the wind and the flame moving us forward in ministry. Some days it seems that we are standing in the smoke, but together we can all try to stay close to the Spirit in addressing the needs of this congregation and this community. Blow, Spirit, Blow!

PRAY with me: **Come Holy Spirit, Fill the hearts of your faithful and kindle in us the fire of your love. Send forth your Spirit and we shall be created, and you shall renew the face of the earth. O God, who by the light of the Holy Spirit do instruct the hearts of the faithful, grant that we may be truly wise and ever enjoy your consolations. Through Christ our Lord, Amen.**