

*Wild Winds*  
Pentecost Sunday  
May 19, 2013  
Jill R. Russell

Texts:       Acts 2.1-21;  
              Psalm 104;  
              Romans 8.14-17;  
              John 14.8-17, 25-27

I am going to be a delegate this year at the General Synod meeting of our denomination in June. Whenever I attend large gatherings of any kind, I confess to something I suspect many of you might do as well. As I walk around meeting new people my radar is tuned to find the kindred spirits in the place. In this case, I'm looking for the reformed progressives – the ones who love our tradition and whose love for God lead them to stand for social justice and inclusivity, to appreciate the complexity of what it means to be human, and who read scripture with a wide open and inquisitive mind. And maybe the ones who congregate at the pub after the meeting and might even curse from time to time. This is not just a survival mechanism for making my way through what promises to be a contentious General Synod meeting but the way that many of us make our way through life. We look for the ones who speak our language and help us to carve out a little place where we can feel at home and at peace.

You may wonder why I should share this as a confession. After all, the passage from the gospel of John today speaks of the gift of the Holy Spirit as an Advocate who will bring comfort and peace to the disciples. Looking for places where we can both be reminded of all that Jesus taught us and where we can be fully ourselves and trust that we will be received and accepted that sounds like the very stuff that Jesus promised us. That is what the disciples were doing on the day of Pentecost. This was one of the three high holy days of their Jewish faith. People were gathering all over the city to honor the day of Pentecost and celebrate the gift of the law that was given to at Mt. Sinai. They were not at the temple that day or in one of the local synagogues. They were gathered together with their fellow Jews who were also followers of Jesus. They were with the ones who

understood all that they had been through. They surrounded themselves with the people who shared their understanding of God and could support them in being faithful to everything Jesus had taught them.

The place of confession for seeking some comfort among kindred spirits comes when we begin to *limit* the movement of God's Spirit to those places. What happened on the day of Pentecost is that the wild winds of the Spirit blew open that small gathering of kindred spirits who were all speaking the same language both literal and figural. As you read the text you see that the crowds came not because of the sound of wind or the vision of fire. They came because they heard the disciples speaking in their native languages.

All of a sudden this wasn't a group of kindred Galileans. This became a gathering of strangers from many different places, different cultures, and different experiences who are drawn together by their sense of awe for the way that the Spirit was revealing God's deeds of power to each of them in their own language. I'm not interested in whether this happened in precisely this way or how. I'm interested in the impact of this story: that God's Spirit blew among them in a way they could never have imagined; the way that each of them was invited to experience God in the language of their own heart but also in a way that connected this room full of strangers to find communion of soul.

I wonder how often we miss these opportunities because we have such a limited view of where and when and how God's Spirit can move. Yes, the Spirit of God is an advocate soothing our troubled hearts but God's Spirit is also a wild wind that blows wide open our tight circles, our limited vision, and our narrow expectations. How often do we walk around in places that feel unfamiliar looking to be startled by the Holy Spirit? Listening for someone who is not "speaking my language" so to say but someone who is on a completely different wave length who just might have something for us to see and hear and learn about God's deeds of power in the world - something that might amaze and perplex and lead us to wonder what it all could mean?

This is not easy....especially as we grow older. We often see adventure as the province of the young. Biking from Europe to Asia is something I am far too settled in my life to even consider. But as I read the scriptures I recognize that adventure (by which I mean openness to new ideas and experiences and expressions of God's grace) is the province of the *faithful* regardless of age. As Peter quoting from the prophet Joel says to us today: "In the last days it will be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions and your old men shall dream dreams....so that everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved."

I don't really mean that we all need to bike from Europe to Asia in order to be open to the wildness of God's Spirit....adventure takes many different forms. What I am holding up for us today is an invitation to let God's Spirit move - to astonish and amaze us as we open our lives to the many different people and the varied and wondrous ideas and experiences that life in God's Spirit can hold. To seek out not just the ones who speak our language and see the world as we do but to trust that in the Spirit we can find communion in a room full of strangers.

We were witnesses today as Sophie, Alex, and Amy professed their faith among us. I want to close this morning with a word expressly to the three of you that I hope will be relevant to us all. I ran across a piece by Mark Yacanelli which he shared with his son at his graduation back in 2010. This is not your graduation....I want to say that quite clearly. We never graduate when it comes to professing our faith. But you are at a point of transition where the faith that your parents held for you is now becoming expressly your own. You come from a long line of people who have followed God before you and now we bless you to venture far and wide to see where God's Spirit will take you in the years to come. Some of what I read this week in that article has kept coming back to me. And I want to share it with you as a charge on this Pentecost Sunday.

Amy, Alex, and Sophie:

"Seek until you can't seek any more... Search and question...and try stuff until you discover every true and good thing that's in you and in the

world. The real question...for each of us is, "How do you shake loose the grace and love that is buried within?" ...Of course, there are all kinds of answers to this question. You look for clues. You test yourself. You try study and see where that gets you. You take odd jobs. You stalk people you admire and make them answer your questions. You notice what makes your heart race, and see where it leads. ...In other words let life loose in you. Free the Jesus who remains trapped within your heart (and mine)...let him walk around within you. Let him sit among those places in you that cause you to feel stuck or ashamed. Watch as he sits in those places and feels comfortable. Watch how he talks to those parts of you that are so deeply fearful. Notice that he's not afraid of anything within you? See how he not only accepts but actually sees the good in those parts of you (and me) that make you so uncomfortable? See how he befriends them?... Then you may be surprised to notice that like Jesus, you too have the power to befriend all that is hidden in the world – the drunk, the abuser, the A student who tortures himself with visions of perfection. Notice that you actually have the capacity to sit with anyone–everyone who feels ugly and unwanted. Notice that you actually like sitting down and talking with these undesirables. ..and that somehow, somewhere within you, you're coming to life...You're keeping the walls of your heart soft and pliable. You're capable of receiving love from people. You're capable of trusting and receiving love from God."<sup>1</sup>

Alex, Sophie, Amy – if you do these things – if we **all** do these things we may just find ourselves amazed and astonished at all that God's Spirit can bring.

Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> Mark Yaconelli, *Letter to a Young Graduate*, May 10, 2010, <http://www.patheos.com/Resources/Additional-Resources/Letter-To-A-Young-Graduate>