

*Wind*  
Second Sunday of Lent  
March 12, 2017  
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Texts:       Genesis 12.1-4a;  
              Psalm 121;  
              Romans 4.1-5, 13-17;  
              John 3.1-17

I've been wondering your reaction when you opened your Lent devotionals and saw we would be diving into the book of Lamentations for 40 days and pairing that biblical text with quotes from the book *Prophetic Lament* by Soong-Chan Rah. My suspicion is that whether you go with Soong-Chan Rah in examining our nation's racial history and the church's complicity in it or whether you have more than enough flowing from your own personal life or the tracking of the evening news ---- most of us will have no trouble finding plenty of material for a season of lament.

The challenge of the book of Lamentations is to look at what IS without any rush to fix it or sugar coat it or in some other way try to minimize it or put a happy ending spin on it. The risk, of course, to looking at reality square in the face without flinching is that it can pull us into hopelessness. I hope it goes without saying that is not the goal of Lent: to become hopeless. It's just one of the risks of being human; of being with what IS.

I suspect Abraham and Sarah knew very well this territory where facing reality can tip toward hopelessness. We read today the beautiful call of Abram; the promise of God to call Abram and Sarai to a new land and to make of them a great nation: "I will bless you, and make your name great....and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed....So Abram went."<sup>1</sup> The book of Romans picks up on Abram's profound trust in this promise and weaves a theological argument about justification by faith and not works. All of it is grounded in this response of Abram in Genesis, chapter 12. Of course, if you read the whole story of the Abraham and

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<sup>1</sup> Genesis 12.2-4 excerpted, NRSV

Sarah it is anything but a straight line between God promises and Abraham trusts and all is well in the world.

That territory of facing reality and tipping toward hopelessness? They fell over that line a number of times. When the reality of their age and the number of years kept piling up - when the cause and effect rules of nature were screaming at them to face reality - they took matters into their own hands and made a royal mess of things. (It actually gives me hope that Paul can look back on all the sordid details of their story and lift them up as an example of what it looks like to trust God and have that trust be reckoned as righteousness. Clearly this isn't about being perfect - thank God!)

Then we have Nicodemus who in a very different way was getting stuck in his reality. He was intrigued by Jesus; clearly among the ones who were impressed by the power of his signs. When Jesus looked inside of Nicodemus he saw a man who was struggling to remain part of the religious establishment and remain open to the fresh winds of God's Spirit. Nicodemus sensed something moving in Jesus that he was drawn toward but didn't yet understand just how profoundly his world would be upended if he followed that movement.

Jesus tells him "No one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above." Then Nicodemus gets literal and stuck around the mechanics of what he failed to understand was a metaphor. So Jesus tries a different angle: "The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit."<sup>2</sup>

If we look at what IS and believe that it determines what will be, then hopelessness is all we have. But if Jesus is right that the Spirit of God is like the Wind then we have every reason to hope even as we look reality square in the face and refuse to look away. Because the wind? The wind can move all kind of crazy ways. It is powerful, it is unpredictable. I invite you to

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<sup>2</sup> John 3.8, NRSV

watch the slideshow in the gathering area<sup>3</sup> and see the insights that have come from all of you as you have reflected this week on the wind.

As I have sat with these texts and my own lament and stood in the cold and blowing wind this week, I find myself full of hope. Gordon said recently that he is no longer optimistic but he is still yet full of hope. And that strikes me as exactly the place that God wants us to be this Lent. Our hope is grounded not in some belief in the goodness of human kind that will eventually do the right thing. Our hope is grounded in this promise that those of us who are born of the Spirit are subject to the wind that blows where it will.

I was reminded in a book I read this fall called *Grounded* that the ancient Hebrews thought of the heavens as being up in the sky. We just have to remember, she said, that “the sky begins at our feet. Thus, we actually live in the heavens now, in the space in which earth and sky meet.” But the other way to think about the place where the sky and the earth meet is at the horizon. And so she said, “The Spirit calls our gaze outward, to lift our eyes to the edge.”<sup>4</sup>

This is different from of thinking of God as outside of our realm who occasionally intervenes in some magical way. If we think about God’s Spirit as being like the wind – present everywhere the sky and earth meet – then we begin to recognize that God is both present here in every breath we take and that God’s Spirit is beyond us out at the horizon that we can move toward and never reach.

And that gives me hope because that means that there is far more going on that what my eyes can see or my mind can predict. The element of the wind and the story of Abraham and Sarah, they make clear to me just how complicated and interconnected is the web of our life with God’s life. Out

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<sup>3</sup> You can what this slide show was based upon by going to this link to our Hope Church facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/hopechurchholland/photos/a.458948424167286.108792.397772696951526/1396721780389941/?type=3&theater>

<sup>4</sup> Diana Butler Bass, *Grounded: Finding God in the World, A Spiritual Revolution* (New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishing, 2015), 201-121.

of the crazy, and at times wicked, web of Abraham and Sarah's life - still, God brought forward this blessing.

As I look at some of the broken, intractable dimensions of our life as human beings on this planet, I feel both the pain of that brokenness and a curious kind of hope. Because I trust this One who "gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist".<sup>5</sup> I cannot see how all of that is going to play itself out but I want to be a part of it.

As we come to the table as we do on each Sunday in the season of Lent, I invite us to bring with us both our lament and our hope. Because the One who hosts at this table knows the brokenness of this world. He has known it in his own body. He calls us every time we break this bread and drink of this cup to remember his life and his death and even more to remember his life beyond death.... a life that lives in us here and now.

So let us come. For all things are now ready.

Thanks be to God!

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<sup>5</sup> Romans 4.17, NRSV