

“Pentecost: The Wind Still Blows”

John 20:19-23/Genesis 1:1-2; 2:4b-9

Pentecost Sunday/May 24, 2026

1st Presbyterian Church of Sharon

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I. Introduction

Last summer when Laura and I came back from Chautauqua we stopped at Erie. The tall ships were in town. They had sailed in the day before. So now they were docked in the downtown Erie harbor.

The tall ships are 2, 3 and 4 masted wooden sailing ships usually 150-250 feet long. The masts that hold the sails are 100 to 200 feet tall. A few are original and over 150 years old. But most are replicas. They all model sailing as it was and are used for teaching and tourism and history. We were excited to see them.

After parking we stood in line to get tickets. With a cheaper ticket you could go on the docks and look at the ships. For a more expensive ticket you could go on the ships. We decided to get the full experience and go on the ships. By the way, it was a very long line.

After getting our tickets we navigated our way to the docks. The ships were close, but for whatever reason we couldn't "get there from here." Rather we had to find our way through a maze following signs that didn't always make sense. Fortunately, there were also "tall ship volunteers" that directed the way.

Finally we got to our first tall ship. It was all wood and brass and rope and canvas; it was beautiful. And so, we waited in line again. Only so many people could go on the ship at a time. It made sense, but it was a little frustrating.

Finally we got to the gang plank and walked on board. We walked around the deck, everyone going the same counterclockwise direction to keep things orderly. We couldn't go inside the ship, but I looked through windows and open doors to see what I could see. I'm curious about a lot of things. I remember as we walked around on the deck the ship seemed smaller. But looking straight up the masts seemed taller. The name "tall ships" made sense. Of course, all the sails were down and the rope and cables neatly stored. And just like that the tour was over. I loitered a couple times talking to the crew. But I think that was "frowned upon" so to keep people moving.

We stood in line to tour a couple more ships. It was the same experience. By then we had had enough of the lines and were hungry, so we went to a nearby restaurant on the harbor and

had a late lunch. We ate outside so we viewed the tall ships and the crowds and the long lines. It was a beautiful afternoon.

I would not say we were disappointed. But what I think we realized was that what we really wanted to see were these majestic ships sailing in. We wanted to see the sails filled with wind. We wanted to see them cutting through the waves. We wanted to see and hear the power of movement without noise. We wanted to see ballet of wind and sail and crew. It was like seeing an eagle in a cage at the zoo. It's sort of interesting. But what you really want is to see the majesty of an eagle freely soaring on the updrafts.

The tall ships won't be back until 2028. I think we will probably look for the dates. And maybe go a day early. And find a nice beach a little north of the Erie harbor. And take a picnic. And watch the beauty and power of the ships with sails filled with wind coming into the harbor. Maybe we'll see an eagle, too.

Today is Pentecost Sunday. It's about the wind, breath, life, and power of God. It's called the Holy Spirit, the third member of the trinity. And it's often described as wind or breath. The word in Hebrew is "ruach." In Greek it's "pneuma." They both mean wind, breath, power, life. It's about sails filled with wind, not docked in a harbor. And it's the Holy Spirit, the "ruach" that fills the sails of the church, a church, this church, and drives us forward and gives us life.

II. Text and Brief Exegesis

An interesting place to begin is at the beginning; Genesis 1. It's the first creation story. What we have in the first couple verses; the setting for creation. Nothing has happened yet. It's all a dark, churning, formless void. Imagine the chaos of a storm at sea. Nothing can be.

And over this stormy sea moves the wind of God. It's God's Spirit and power for creation. It's the Hebrew word "ruach." And through God's Spirit God will create. It's important to note that God is not creation. God is not the dark, churning, formless void. But God is present, moving over the face of the deep, ready to begin to bring light and form and life to where there was none.

In Genesis 2 we get a second, older creation story. And this story focuses on the creation of human beings. The story tells us that "God formed man from the dust of the ground." In Hebrew, there's a play on words; man, "adam" in Hebrew, is formed from dirt of the earth, "adamah" in Hebrew. It's a strong statement that human beings are not gods, but part of this creation. But the creation of man is not done. There is no life. It's just a pile of dirt. So God breathes into this "adam" made from "adamah." The Hebrew word for "breathed" here is "neshamah." It also means breath or soul. The idea is that the mystery of life depends upon the breath of God. Without God you have a pile of dirt. But with God you have a human being. As in the first creation story, the wind or breath of God is necessary.

And so on this Pentecost Sunday, the Sunday we celebrate the wind, breath, Spirit of God, we come to our reading from John. Listen for references to the stories of creation.

Read John 20:19-23.

In John's Easter story, it's evening. Earlier that day Mary Magdalene and the disciples discovered an empty tomb. The risen Christ then appeared to Mary. And she told the disciples. The disciples wonder if it could be true.

In fear the disciples are together behind closed and locked doors. They are in Jerusalem. A couple days earlier they had seen Jesus crucified. It was now a dangerous thing to be a follower of Jesus. So they hid wondering about the empty tomb and Mary's story of resurrection.

It's then that Jesus appears to them. "Peace be with you" he says. They could use the blessing of peace. Life has felt anything but "peaceful." Somehow the risen Christ appears to them behind closed doors with the signs of crucifixion. John's point is that this is really Jesus, risen from the dead. He blesses them with peace again.

What happens next is clearly connected to the creation stories in Genesis. As God's Spirit, wind, breath, power, brings creation and life, so Jesus breathes the same Spirit, wind, breath, and power on them. It is creation. It is the beginning of new life with the risen Christ. And their mission and life together are new. Peace takes the place of fear. A great mission takes the place of hiding. The Spirit of God, the wind of God, is creating again. As God sent Jesus with the message of God's love and salvation, so now Jesus sends these disciples. On their own they would fail. But empowered and created with the mighty wind of God's Spirit they can, and will, share the message of Jesus Christ. In the gospel of John, it is the Pentecost story.

III. Brief Theological Reflection

In most places it is a season of fear. People talk with me about it. We feel it. There is fear of change. There is fear of difference. There is fear of there not being enough. Many politicians and the White House feed these fears to serve their own ends. There is fear of immigrants. Fear of lost jobs. Fear of gay and lesbian people. Fear of those who speak different languages or believe different religions or have different skin colors. Fear of the media. Fear of vaccines that have been effective for years. Fear of the truth, so lies are told as true. Fear of some great conspiracy to replace the white race in America. It was once whispered in the dark corners and now has gone "mainstream." And so, two teenagers this past Monday, filled with fear and hate, attack a school in San Diego for Muslim children.

And that fear has found it's way into some Christian churches. And so there is self-righteousness and judgementalism. There are pronouncements of God's coming judgement against people with different politics, and different world views, and different religions, and different values. And so shouting is valued more than listening. And arrogance is valued more

than humility. And power is valued more than kindness. These churches' symbol is more the imperial eagle of the Roman Empire than the cross of Christ. And like seasons of fear before, the nonsense is believed as true. And it is not the gospel.

But in a season of fear the wind of the Spirit still blows. And so, we are not afraid. We are not tall ships with our sails down moored to the dock. Rather we are out on the sea, sails up, moved by the power of God's Spirit, sharing in the mission given by Christ. And so, we will share with our neighbors at a Block Party next month. And so, youth go on a mission trip. And so, we extend hospitality to all people. We are not afraid. And so, we are one church with progressives and conservatives. And so, we will host a summer program for at-risk teenagers. And beginning next fall 1st Church will be a location for a Sharon Head Start program. And so, we do the harder work of love, and sometimes fail, and then try again. We are not afraid.

It is Pentecost. The wind still blows. There's peace, not fear. Amen.