

The Wind of God and United Mission

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When we are united in God's mission, our United Mission will grow.

On Good Friday, my wife, one of our grandsons, and I attended a service at an American Baptist congregation that I once served as pastor. It was a wonderful experience of worship as Lent drew to a close.

As the service began, the only lighted candle was the Christ candle on the communion table. The order of worship came to a moment labeled *Dark Silence*. The plan was that one of the lay readers was to extinguish the light. When the lay reader approached the candle, she and everyone else realized that the candle was already extinguished.

An unfelt breeze had blown the candle out. I could not help but think: the wind, God's Spirit, preceded the intended human act. I also remembered that Jesus' crucifixion was not the final act.

In a divine reversal, God acted again on the third day as Jesus lay in the tomb. God raised Jesus from the dead—the Resurrection, the miracle of miracles—a stab into the universe, a new creation.

“If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile....” Paul wrote later to the church at Corinth (1 Corinthians 15:17).

Meda A. A. Stamper observed that the biblical record describes hardships throughout the Easter texts: “... resistance from without and resistance from within, because God's newness is so unexpected and often so challenging that even the faithful may not immediately embrace it. There are stories of disorientation and sorrow. There are floggings, angry mobs, prison cells. There is death. But these things do not win finally. Transformation, worship, awe, joy, praise, faithfulness, service, love: these win when God's newness is in play. And these texts insist that God's newness is always, always, relentlessly in play.”

The writer of the fourth Gospel (John 20:21b) recorded Jesus' words after the crucifixion and resurrection appearances: “As the Father has sent me, so I send you!” God sent Jesus; Jesus told us to go (see also Matthew 28). Those are the haunting words that send us into the world.

But there is more. Then came Pentecost. “When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. (Acts 2:1-2, NRSV)

Peter addressed the crowd: “...this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel: ‘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....’” (Acts 2:16-17)

Fifty days after the Resurrection of Jesus came the day of Pentecost: God’s Spirit was poured out upon all flesh. Pentecost is sometimes referred to as the birthday of the church. And today, even today, the Holy Spirit is present and works among us.

The world is dark, ominous, even frightening. North Korea has nuclear weapons. Iran is developing nuclear capacity. Suicide bombers do their works of terror. The Christ candle burns.

Can we who are the church in the 21st century live as a post-resurrection people in the light of Easter? Because the Holy Spirit is with us, the answer is “yes.” The wind of God blows, even today. A familiar hymn begins: “I feel the winds of God today. Today my sail I lift.” Let’s catch the wind.

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Ron