

## **“RE-WINDING FAITH”**

Acts 2:1-18

May 20, 2018 – Pentecost & Confirmation

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Quite a few years ago, on one of our family trips to Maine, we stopped off in New Hampshire and drove to the summit of Mt. Washington, reputed to be one of the windiest places on earth, recording winds in excess of 250 miles per hour. When we began the ascent, the weather was sunny, and there was a slight breeze. While we were on the peak, the wind picked up considerably as rain became nearly horizontal and visibility seriously reduced. It was a memorable experience of weather, a new experience of wind.

There was in that experience a sense of God’s awesome power. It was as if I could hear God in the sound of the wind. I wonder if something like that was going on for the disciples at Pentecost. They didn’t feel the force of those winds perhaps, and there may have been no wind at all. Acts tells us that there “came a sound like the rush of a mighty wind.” The sound atop Mt. Washington that day was deafening. It grabbed my attention almost as much as the force of the winds. We had to shout at each other to be heard over the noise. Was it this sound that filled the house where the disciples were gathered? Was this the “power” for which Jesus had asked them to wait?

Acts is considered by most scholars to be part two of Luke’s gospel. Part one explored the life of Jesus with and among the disciples. It was about the Jesus who is for us. Acts picks up the story with Jesus’ departure and goes on to write about the Jesus who is in us. The power shifts from Jesus to the disciples. Faith moves from Jesus to his followers. The flow is captured in the sound of the wind.

Confirmation is a kind of Pentecost. We celebrate a faith that is moving from those who have been nurturing these young people to a faith that they are taking up for their own. They are moving from a Jesus who is for them to a Jesus that is in them.

Today, we are rewinding faith, witnessing the wind that is passing through us once again. We are getting a new look at the faith as we return to the beginnings of the church. We are living again Joel’s words, where the spirit is poured out on our sons and daughters, where visions are seen and new dreams arise.

These youth have chosen to join the church of the ages, but they bring with them new ways of looking at faith. They bring their understandings of God in the world, of Jesus for and in us, and of the Spirit’s active presence in their lives.

In this rewinding of faith, we should note that it does not mark an ending, but a new beginning. These youth have not arrived at a maturity of their faith. From this day they will grow and they will continue to change. They will understand many of the things that they have declared in their faith statements differently as the years pass.

When I worked with them on their faith statements, I was not trying to bring them to a “correct” view of faith. I did not expect them to have a sophisticated understanding of the doctrine of the Trinity, of atonement, of theodicy. Their mentors have worked hard helping them to hear the core beliefs of Presbyterians, but I wasn’t looking for them to reflect that faith back to me. I wanted to hear what they thought about God, about Jesus, about the Holy Spirit, about the world, the good and the bad of it, and about their sense of connection to God.

Let me tell you some of what I heard. Most of them believe that God has a plan for them. I haven’t heard this way of putting it for a long time. If you’ve been trying to put together some basic ideas from my preaching, you may have noticed that I focus a great deal more on what we are doing as we seek to follow Jesus and less on what God is doing.

Not only does God have a plan, but the plan includes the good and the bad things that happen to us. God is not just blessing us all the time, but guiding us to greater and greater faithfulness. Sometimes the path to deeper faith passes through hardship. This, too, is part of the plan.

Now this isn’t how I would put it today, but I was reminded that I did use this language early in my faith journey. God has a plan. Bad things happen for a reason. You can take these things too far. There are times and things that happen that don’t fit this view of faith very well. They don’t answer all the questions that arise over the course of a faith journey. And yet our conversation together was a good “rewinding” of my faith, a return to early days, a reminder of good things that maybe I had let go. I’m sure our mentors experienced that as well as they talked with these youth.

It was good to be reminded that God does have intentions for our lives, maybe not some highly structured, detailed plan, but certainly a vision for what faithful discipleship would look like for me. It was good to be reminded of the ways that God can use disappointment, failure, even tragedy to deepen faith. It is good to rewind faith and allow the Spirit’s wind to blow through us, reminding us of the great things that God has done, reminding us as on the day of Pentecost in a language that we can understand.

Today our sons and daughters see visions and dream dreams. They recall us to our beginnings, to the early days of our faith, and as happened last week, recall us to our baptisms. We rewind the faith that we might be renewed and refreshed as we continue to follow Jesus. Today is a day of celebration, a day to give thanks for the wind of the spirit, for the new faith in our youth, and the new faith among all of us as we see new visions and dreams. Thanks be to God. Amen.