

## **“Adjust Your Sails”**

Date: June 9, 2019

Place: Lakewood UMC

Texts: John 15:26-27; 16:4-15; Acts 2:1-21 Occasion: Pentecost Sunday

Themes: Pentecost, attitude

I have always been fascinated by the wind. Maybe it's because preachers are full of hot air, or so I've been told. I've always been curious when a wind comes up out of nowhere, mesmerized during a storm when things are getting thrown around. If I had a little more courage I might be a storm chaser – one of those people who follow tornados around, just to get a good look at them. I am fascinated by their power and fury. Wind intrigues me.

When I was in high school I had a friend who owned a sailboat, and he took me out for a sail one afternoon on the Chesapeake Bay. I learned a little bit more about the wind that afternoon. Allen told me that in order to make the sailboat go where you wanted it to go, you had to adjust your sail. He said, “You can't change the wind; you have to adjust your sail.”

Well, we were sailing along pretty good enjoying a nice ride, until the wind stopped. And then we just sat in the water, going nowhere. After an hour or more of waiting for the wind to pick up, Allen told me, “Sometimes you have to paddle. If we're going to get back to shore, we're going to have to paddle.” I learned that it's a lot harder to move a boat under your own muscle power, than it is to let the wind do the work for you.

I want you to keep that image in mind as we go along this morning, because the wind is a powerful metaphor for the Holy Spirit. Today is Pentecost, the birthday of the church. It is that day in church history when God poured forth God's spirit upon the early disciples in a powerful display.

Wind and fire are the metaphors for God's powerful presence that descended upon the disciples.

After his resurrection, Jesus stayed with his disciples for 40 days, until he was taken up into Heaven, on that day we refer to as the Ascension, which we celebrated last Sunday. Before He left them, Jesus told his disciples to wait and pray. He told them he was going to send His Holy Spirit so they could continue His ministry.

On the day of Pentecost, 10 days after the ascension and 50 days after Easter, the Holy Spirit came upon the disciples, and all those gathered in Jerusalem. Though they all spoke in different languages, they all understood each other. Some of them spoke in tongues, a different kind of language, one more like what the angels speak than any known human language.

Peter, who had denied Jesus three times on the night of His arrest, was now filled with Holy Spirit's power. When he preached that day, many people were saved. It was an exciting day – God's power was being demonstrated. God's presence was being felt. And the church was born.

There is a sense in which Pentecost is both mysterious and practical. Mysterious because we don't fully understand it, and practical because it gives us some advice we *can* understand.

Remember that image of the sailboat? You can't change the wind, so you have to adjust your sails! This morning I want to talk about adjusting our sails, so that we can be more receptive to the wind of God's Holy Spirit.

Our attitude towards life is so important. After the crucifixion, the disciples could see only defeat. God intended something glorious – the salvation of human-kind. But the disciples could see only that Jesus was dead, gone, taken away. Their attitude was defeated.

Oh, they enjoyed his presence when he was with them in the resurrection. But then, when he left them to go to Heaven, I'm sure they felt abandoned again. But this time they turned to God in prayer, seeking his presence, seeking his power, seeking His Holy Spirit. And they were not disappointed.

In our own lives, there are circumstances we face that may cause us to feel defeated, rejected, alone. But our attitude, the way we think about what's happening, radically changes the way we handle life's challenges. We can't change the wind – but we can adjust our sails. A story:

Once upon a time there was a woman who woke up to discover when she looked in the mirror, she only had three hairs on her head. "Well," she said, "I think I'll braid my hair today." She did, and she had a wonderful day.

The next day she woke up, looked in the mirror and saw she only had two hairs on her head. "Hmmm," she murmured, "I think I'll part my hair down the middle today." So she did, and she had a wonderful day."

The next day she woke up, looked in the mirror and noticed she only had one hair on her head. "Well," she said, "Today I'm going to wear my hair in a ponytail." So she did, and she had a wonderful day.

The next day she woke up, looked in the mirror, and saw she didn't have a single hair on her head. "Yea!" she exclaimed. "I don't have to fix my hair today." And she had a wonderful day. Attitude is everything, my friends. You can't change the wind; you have to adjust your sails. This woman couldn't do anything about the number of hairs on her head, but she could change her attitude. The lesson - Adjust your sails!

What is it in life that has you down? Your finances, your kids, your health, your marriage? Are you a recent graduate, worried about what the future holds for you? Adjust your sails! One of my favorite prayers is the

Serenity Prayer. It says, "God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change; the courage to change the things I can; and the wisdom to know the difference." You can't change the wind, but you can adjust your sails.

Another story, about a 92 year-old, petite and well poised lady. She is fully dressed each morning by 8:00, with her hair fashionably coifed and make-up perfectly applied, even though she is legally blind. Today she is moving to a nursing home.

Her husband of 70 years recently passed away, making the move necessary. After many hours of waiting patiently in the lobby of the nursing home, she smiled sweetly when told her room was ready. As she maneuvered her walker to the elevator, the aide provided a visual description of her tiny room, including the eye-let sheets that had been hung in the windows, serving as curtains.

"Oh, I love it!" she said, with the enthusiasm of an 8-year old who had just been given a new puppy. "But Mrs. Jones, you haven't seen the room yet. Just wait."

"That doesn't have anything to do with it," Mrs. Jones answered. "Happiness is something you decide on ahead of time. Whether I like my room or not doesn't depend on how the furniture is arranged; it's how I arrange my mind. I've already decided to love it. It's a decision I make every morning when I wake up."

"You see, I have a choice. I can spend the day in bed, recounting the difficulties I have with the parts of my body that no longer work. Or I get out of bed and give God thanks for the parts that do. Each day is a gift. And as long as my eyes open, I'll focus on the new day. So, I've decided, I love this new room. It's beautiful."

Friends, in life there are going to be things that happen we can't change. But our attitude will determine how we face them. You can't change the wind; you have to adjust your sails. You can't change a lot of things that happen. But you can always turn to God, the author of life, hope and courage. God will supply our every need.

For all of the negative things we may say, God has a positive answer.  
If you say "It's impossible," God says, "all things are possible." (Matt. 18:27)  
If you say, "I'm too tired," God says, "I will give you rest." (Matt. 11:28)  
If you say, "I can't go on," God says, "My grace is sufficient." (2 Cor. 12:9)  
If you say, "I'm afraid," God says, "I have not given you a spirit of fear."  
(2 Timothy 1:7)  
If you say, "I feel alone," God says, "I will never leave you nor forsake you."  
(John 14:18) Adjust your sails!

My friends, the other lesson I learned when I first went sailing was this. It's a lot harder to move forward when you have to rely on your own muscle-power. It's a lot easier when the wind moves the boat. Life is a lot harder when we forget that God's Spirit is willing to help us. Stop trying to do life on your own, and invite God's Spirit to guide you and help you.

The Church never would have gotten off the ground if the disciples had not spent those days in prayer, seeking God's Spirit. If they had depended on their efforts alone, I think the Church would have been a flop, a failure and a disaster. But the disciples knew they couldn't carry on Jesus' ministry without God's help.

Never forget – we are not alone. Never forgot – you don't have to do life on your own. God is always there. God is always present. The power of the Holy Spirit is with you. In a sailboat, you adjust your sail. In life, we go to God in prayer. God has promised to be with us always, in the Spirit. Call upon Him, seek His presence; ask for His power. And may the power of the Holy Spirit fall upon you. Amen, and amen!