

“Wild Goose Chase”

**Psalm 139, Romans 8:26-27
Trinity Sunday**

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May 27, 2018**

Once I clipped a story by Joyce Holliday from *Sojourners* magazine: “It was barely dawn,” she wrote, “and I was still sound asleep. Then came a noise – a holy racket of sorts. Honking and calling and furious fluttering of wings. I made it to the front porch just in time to see eight huge Canada Geese land in the lake and on the little farm house where I live. With great fanfare, they touched down and then skimmed across the water to a stop, wings still beating the air.”

“Red fire seemed to rise between the trees on the eastern horizon, then slowly it turned orange and finally, stabbing yellow. Birds and bugs of all sorts joined in an early morning chorus of welcome to the day – humming, chirping, whistling, singing. I laughed out loud.”

“Like the beginning of a new day, it seemed like Pentecost descending -- the powerfully rushing wings, tongues of fire, a cacophony of voices. Startling. Dazzling. Unpredictable. Enough to make the neighbors think someone raided nature’s wine cellar before the sun had even come up.”

The text we heard in this room last Sunday told the story in a different way. The New English Bible makes it sound like an ordinary day: “While the day of Pentecost was running its course,” . . . and then it continues: “devout Jews from every nation” heard the rushing wind and gathered with the disciples in Jerusalem early in the morning. The disciples had been fretting about what they were going to do without Jesus. Then, before any of them could defend themselves, that mighty wind blew through the house, striking sparks that burst into flames above their heads, and in one fell swoop they were filled God’s wild, restless, rambunctious, untamed Spirit. Ordinary, everyday people filled with God’s breath. God’s fire, God’s love, God’s Spirit, God’s life. The Spirit Jesus promised had come.

The Spirit filled them and commissioned them at once by breathing on them, by pouring what was inside of God into them. So strongly did the wind blow that their bangs flew and their eyelashes fluttered and they could smell where the Spirit had come from – not just Golgotha and Galilee, but way before that – back when the world was being born. The Spirit that spoke Creation out of the chaos of the deep was reborn.

And as their spirits were born, so was the church. Before the day was over, the church had grown to more than three thousand disciples. Shy people had become bold, scared people had become gutsy, and lost people had found a sense of direction. Disciples who had never believed themselves capable of tying their own sandals without Jesus discovered abilities within themselves they never knew they had. When they opened their mouths to speak, they sounded like Jesus, no matter whether they were from Parthia, Mesopotamia, Cappadocia, Libya, Egypt, or Judea itself. When they laid their hands upon those who needed healing, it was as if Jesus himself touched the sick. In short, they were doing things they had never seen anyone but him do, and there was no explanation that – except – except – that they had breathed the wild wind of God and been transformed by it.

Pentecost woke the people up as though someone had thrown an ocean of ice water on them. Centuries later, when the Celtic Christians heard the story, the wildness of the day prompted them to adopt a “wild goose” as their symbol for the Spirit of God.

They knew geese better than doves. They knew that geese are not controllable. They make a lot of noise and have a habit of biting those who try to contain them. Geese fly faster in a flock than on their own. They protect and guard.

Wild geese remind us that it’s hard to domesticate anything wild and passionate. Good luck trying to pin down the Spirit or predict where it will land. Even if you spend all your energy trying to restrain it, you won’t succeed. The Wild Spirit takes flight when it is ready.

The Celtic Christians were on to something. The Spirit IS like a wild goose. It survives in spite of our human attempts to control it and in spite of them. It comes not only in quiet conformity but also as a noisy, bothersome Spirit, demanding to be heard, though its song is not sweet to everyone. The Spirit urges people to travel with each other, and as it calls them forward, it often touches them with fire, persisting that they become noisy, passionate, and courageous guardians of the gospel.

On this Trinity Sunday, it may take some extra imagination to think of the Holy Spirit as wild, unfettered, uncontrollable. After all, we try to live holy and just lives – with at least a modicum of order. But it would be so much easier if we knew what’s going to happen. So at times we are apt to start thinking that if we do everything decently and in order, that life will follow a prescribed plan. We depend on our phones to remind us of our schedules. The thought may even creep into our minds that we can control our lives.

We wish we could plan the kingdom into being. We wish we could reason the gospel into flourishing among us and our neighbors in this world. But it’s only in the Mystery of God that the Spirit writes us into God’s vast, sprawling script of reconciliation and blessing. The Spirit’s healing and encouragement descends upon us with a healing touch we’ve never felt before. It circles around us like the wind in Dorothy’s Kansas and sets us down on a path we would never have chosen by ourselves.

Nicholas Long suggested that the Spirit is most present in three open spaces in our lives: “In the unpredictable, in the place of risk, and in those areas over which we have no control.”

Think about it. Those are exactly the vulnerable places the disciples inhabited that first Pentecost morning . . . and they are exactly where *we* are more often than not. Isn’t that a good description of our lives? the unpredictable, the place of risk, and the areas over which we have no control – sometimes all at once.

Scary as the unknown can be, there's an odd peace that comes when we realize that ultimately, part of life is out of our control. God's Spirit moves around, utterly oblivious to human rules, giving us challenges and blessings that we could never schedule or invite into our lives. And yet they come and come and come.

The best Pentecost gift is the Spirit lighting upon you when you need it most. Have you ever been in that place Nicholas Jones was talking about when you are the most vulnerable and open and venture to say, "God, I can't do this by myself. I need you. I need your Spirit." Could be that sounds like a risky thing to say. Even a bit wild.

"Noisy and "boisterous" is only one perception of the Spirit. Sometimes, when the Spirit does come, she meets you with more gentleness and grace than you had expected. Listen again to the words of the anthem written by John Bell, who founded the Iona Community, on the wild and rocky northwest island of Iona, Scotland, the same place where earlier the Celtic Christians imagined the Wild Goose:

She sits like a bird, brooding on the waters.
hov'ring on the chaos of the world's first day;
She sighs and she sings, mothering creation,
waiting to give birth to all the Word will say.

She wings over earth, resting where she wishes, lighting close at hand or
soaring through the skies;
She nests in the womb, welcoming each wonder,
nourishing potential hidden to our eyes.

She dances in fire, startling those who see her,
waking tongues of ecstasy where dullness reigned;
She weans and inspires, all whose hearts are open,
nor can she be captured, silenced or restrained.

For she is the Spirit, one with God in essence,

gifted by the Savior in eternal love;
she is the key opening the scriptures,
enemy of apathy and heav'nly dove.

If you don't want anything to change in your life, then no need to pray the "Come, Holy Spirit" prayer. But if you are the type of person who likes to stand out on the porch when there is a storm moving through so you can feel the power that is pushing the trees around or to watch a fiery sky, then a prayer inviting the Wild Spirit into your life is an invitation you may want to extend.

After a while, after spending time in the wild, anticipating with all your senses what you may see or hear or experience, you may begin to recognize some of the markings of the Holy Spirit and begin to name them -- the strength it gives you to take risks, the power to forgive and reconcile, the clarity that rises above all the conflicting languages your mind and heart are speaking, the steady breath that allows you take in the promises of God and breathe them out to the world.

This Spirit, this very presence of God, is our assurance that we are not alone, that we do not fend for ourselves in this difficult world, that there IS a power much bigger than hatred and war and gun violence and racism and disease and pain and death, despite what we see . . . but, if we look, we will indeed SEE the Spirit's power transforming the world through Trinitarian people.

For the Wild Goose of Pentecost has descended on the disciples of every age, even ours, making them the noisy people who fight for justice, who others find jobs, who share their meals with the hungry. They are the people who look hard at what others do not see. The Wild Goose babbles "that's not right!" when too many go unprotected . The raucous goose makes some people bold enough to shout a truth we would rather not hear. It nips at us in our comfort.

The Wild Goose of Pentecost is alive in those who, along with Martie and Vern Sauter and a thousand other progressive Christians, heard Jim Wallis,

Richard Rohr, Michael Curry, and Walter Bruggemann Thursday night and then lighted candles to carry to the White House on in a silent response to the moral and political crises in our country. Also this week thousands of women, prompted by the Wild Goose, were noisy and signed a petition to oust Paige Patterson from his presidency of Southwestern Seminary after years of his turning a deaf ear to their cries of abuse. The spirited Wild Goose is alive in those who work through Baylor classes taught by Victor Hinojosa and Lori Baker, and with Catholic Charities, and other agencies are called to assist child migrants with their journeys north – and in the holy work of the hospitality of the poor country of Nicaragua who gives refuge to its Central American neighbors as the poor country of Jordan gives to its Syrian neighbors. The Wild Goose is alive in Ashley Thornton's collaboration with children at J.H. Hinds Elementary School as they write and illustrate their feelings until they see them in a published book!

You may feel the wildness of the spirit alive in you when your heart is touched by the spiritual work of others, and you know your call is to lift their names to the Lord!

The Wild Goose is alive in you when you deliver a meal to the elderly or to new parents, when you go off your usual path to give someone a ride to church, when you give an hour reading in a Children's Center Classroom and notice how much you have enjoyed the time, when, as a college student, you decide to volunteer in another culture.

The Wild Goose of Pentecost is as passionate in its gentleness as in its exuberance. It is as powerful in its quiet presence as in its burst of energy, as strong in its single word as in a thousand voices. It heals our spirits in ways no one else may ever understand. When “we do not know how to pray as we ought, that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words.

Pentecost, however, is not an event to be wished for lightly. For once you pray, “Come, Spirit, come, you've got to be ready.” The Spirit is given to doing its own thing: “The wind blows where it wills, and you hear the sound of

it, but you do not know whence it comes or whither it goes; so it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.”

So as the Spirit blows, then so do we – for we are born of the Spirit of God. “So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.” So it is with all of us who want to look for God in a surprising way each morning.

We are on a Wild Goose chase. The honk that wakes us up may be the noisy, Pentecostal Spirit, sounding the original note of God’s presence in our midst.

Here you’ve got a flock to travel with, even if we’re not always moving in V formation. But with wild hope, we move where the Wind of the Spirit blows.

You might see a miracle once in a while.

You might hear a wind pushing the sides of this room, urging us into the world.

You just never know . . . After all, it’s the season of Pentecost, and wilder things have happened.