

Lake Shore Baptist Church Sermon – May 31, 2020

Charlie Fuller

Text: Acts 2:1-21

Title: *A Wind Bigger Than Texas*

Back when Cindy and I lived in Arkadelphia, Arkansas we decided to remodel a house. Now, don't get the idea that we did all the work ourselves. We didn't. It was an extensive job and we were both working full-time. One day the painters were working at the house and I went by the check on the work. I walked in and there at my feet was a big bucket full of a bunch of metal. I didn't realize at first what was in there, but when I bent over to get a closer look, it quickly became clear.

The bucket was filled with hinges. I was fascinated by this collection of hinges. Heavy, yet a bit elegant. They were all shiny steel and they all had a distinct purpose.

Let me state the obvious. Hinges exist to open doors. To make a way where once there was not a way.

Lauren DiPino is a writer based on Los Angeles. She wrote about hinges this week in a New York Times opinion piece. She described hinges as “the points from which change emanates. They evoke motion...Without hinges, our doors would get stuck — and so would we.”

Hinges mark transitions. We're in and then we're out. Or vice versa. In today's text, the Jesus movement has been in a hinge time, a time of transition. Jesus has been crucified and has risen from the dead. He's returned for 40 days to prepare them for a new future. He ascended, and then Holy Spirit comes to take his place. When the wind blew and the fire singed and Holy Spirit came, it marked the end of this time of transition.

The 40 days after the first Easter and before Pentecost was a hinge in the very fabric of time.

The winds of the Spirit marked the end of a period in time, but they did something else. They were the breath of God blowing the breath of birth into the church, just as God blew the breath of life into all of Creation in Genesis.

So, Happy Birthday, Church! Because Pentecost marked the birth of the church. A hinge moment.

And the story of Pentecost also shows us what the church was to **be**. The newly birthed church was given a model for its purpose and identity. Our text shows us a picture of what God intended for the church.

When the wind blew, people from all over the world heard the gospel story in their own language. What more powerful evidence could there be that the gospel was for everyone? That *inclusion*, not exclusion was to be the order of the day?

Here's another hinge moment: These Jewish followers of Jesus had been born and raised into a faith tradition that was based on ethnicity. Their religious tradition was designed to answer questions about who was in and who was out, who were the insiders and who were the outsiders. Who were included and who were to be excluded? These Jewish disciples had been raised in a tradition that was very good at creating walls and boundaries to provide proper separation.

Let me say something else about hinges: *Hinges make a hole where there was once a wall.* And the winds of Pentecost blew those doors of separation and exclusion wide open, just like a Texas tornado. The good news of Jesus wasn't going to be only for a select group. *It was going to be for everyone.* Pentecost demonstrates that if the gospel isn't good news for everyone, it isn't good news for anyone. The power of Pentecost, the fire and the wind, and the incredible understanding of languages: All of this illustrates a power that blows holes in walls of mere human construction.

And that's where the news of the week comes to haunt us. Yet again, we see that in our world the good news hasn't made it through every door. Not all our human hinges have been opened. In Minneapolis, George Floyd, an African American man, pleaded for his very life and was not heard. Even this week as we celebrate God breathing God's life into the church, we see yet again a person of color being denied their own physical, not just metaphorical breath.

Four of the very people who are charged with keeping us safe, misused their power and ended George Floyd's life. This simply happens too often in our country. We just talked about it a couple of weeks ago. The list of names of real people keeps growing. People just as beloved by God as you and I. *This must end.* The winds of Pentecost remind us that God's justice is for all, not just some.

I was already thinking a lot this week about wind and air and breath. Then came the news of George Floyd's death, brought about because someone put their knee on his neck for **eight** minutes. After he was already handcuffed. Even as he pled for breath, pled for his life.

I thought about the onslaught of COVID-19, a respiratory illness. A person who survived it described it as "having an anvil sitting on their chest." This illness denies breath to our brothers and sisters. COVID-19 has been especially prevalent among communities of color. Dare we not do everything we can to prevent its spread? Can we claim to be the descendants of Pentecost and not do everything we can to prevent the denial of breath to others? And dare we not mourn the world-wide loss of life, now over 100,000 in the United States alone?

We must mourn systems of oppression that keep people of color from being safe and we must mourn systems of governmental incompetence that refused to acknowledge pandemic risk until it was too late. Both of which deny breath to those Jesus died to save.

The example of Pentecost calls out to us to keep working to make holes in the walls of exclusion. We must have the courage to swing open the hinges of our doors and open our entire culture up to the kind of change that will allow people of color to feel safe and to truly *be safe* wherever they may go. To do otherwise is to defy the very message of Pentecost.

My prayer is that those who do defy the message of Pentecost are spitting into that wind, a wind that is indeed, bigger than even Texas. It's a wind big enough to change the entire world.

May the wind of God's Spirit convince us as a society that it's time to stop denying wind to our fellow humans. Because our fellow humans are just as loved as we are. You see, that's exactly what the wind, and the fire, and the understood languages were all about.

May it be so,

Amen.