

Spirit-Powered: 3. The Power of the Wind

John 3:5-8; Acts 19:1-2

May 16, 2021

Pastor Steve Richards

Some of you may remember this story. In February of 1998, Amanda and I took a trip to Hawaii. I was attending an international gathering of facilitators in the Virtues Project, and Amanda went with me. Just getting there was a stretch for us financially. We didn't have enough money to do some of the things we hoped to do once we were there, but one day we picked up a brochure offering a free sunset sailing adventure if we sat through a sales presentation for a time share. We had more time than money, and we signed up for the sales presentation. It didn't take long for the salesperson to realize we would not qualify to purchase a time share, but we were given the sailing adventure. So the next evening, Valentine's Day 1998, we boarded a catamaran to sail into the sunset. There would be food and entertainment. We would see whales, and we would watch the sunset together. For once, I thought, I had arranged a Valentine's Day to remember! We pushed off from the dock. The wind hit the sail and carried us out into the ocean. This little boat surrounded by the massive Pacific Ocean. We saw the whales and watched the sunset – and then as the boat made a turn to return to shore, I got sick – seasick – and for the rest of the cruise, I hung on to a railing and moaned all the way to shore. It was an adventure, just not the adventure I had hope – but one that I've never forgotten.

This morning, I want us to look at the adventure of a Spirit-powered life. In this series on the Holy Spirit, we learned that the word for Spirit in the original languages of the Old and New Testaments means breath or wind – the holy breath or wind of God. To be truly alive, the power of the Holy Spirit, this wind of God must be within us. It is what God wants for you. And today, I want to use sailing as a metaphor for what God wants to do. Sailing is different from motor boating. I've driven a motorboat. It's easy, whatever direction I want to go, I just turn the boat in that direction and the motor takes me to the destination. But sailing is at the mercy of the wind. If there's no wind, you're not going to move. To be able to move, you must pay attention to the wind. You must yield to the wind – and that's what life in the Spirit is all about.

Let's look at the scripture: John 3. Jesus is talking with Nicodemus, a Pharisee, a member of the Sanhedrin which meant he was among the 71 wisest and most religious persons in Israel. Nicodemus was trying to live in God's direction but without the wind – without the Spirit. In verse 5, Jesus says to him: **I assure you, unless someone is born of water and Spirit, it's not possible to enter God's kingdom.** A few weeks ago, we looked at the water of baptism and how the Greek word for baptism is *baptism*, meaning surrender. In baptism, I bury my wants, my agenda, my will. Although I've been baptized only once, every day through repentance, I surrender my agenda. Every morning, I give thanks for the day and then I say, "God, I give my life to you." Surrender. And Jesus says, **Whatever is born of the flesh is flesh, and whatever is born of the Spirit is spirit.** Spirit is the breath of God that makes us fully alive. **Don't be surprised that I said to you, 'You must be born anew.** He's saying, "You must." There is no exception. Remember, Jesus is talking to a religious man who is wise enough to know something is missing. He just doesn't know what it is. No wind! **God's Spirit blows wherever it wishes. You hear its sound, but you don't know where it comes from or where it is going. It's the same with everyone who is born of the Spirit.** In other words, you cannot determine where you are going, but you must be subject to the wind. And this morning, I want to suggest there are three things necessary to live in the fullness of the Holy Spirit.

1. Learn the Language If you are going to sail – if you are going to live in the fullness of God's Wind, you must first learn the language. I look at a book on sailing and it listed ten terms

everyone should know: **Aft - Bow - Port - Starboard - Leeward - Windward - Boom - Rudder - Tacking – Jibing.** None of those words are part of my vocabulary. It's like a foreign language. If you want to live a life in the Spirit, you've got to know what you are doing. You have to understand what to do. I remember when I signed up for driver's training. I was excited about being able to drive, but before they ever let me get behind the wheel, I had to read the book, and they gave me a test to prove that I had read it.

Psalm 119:105 says: **Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path.** Some of us never pick up the Book, because it seems boring. It doesn't have pictures, the language seems foreign, it's about people who lived thousands of years ago – and maybe you tried. Some have told me they spent most of their life in the church and being Christ, but they've never read the Bible. They had one, just haven't read it. But do you know what this is? A map or a GPS. When I was in the 3rd grade, the church gave me a Bible and I took it home and put it in a drawer – and it wasn't until I got to confirmation and we read the book of Acts that I realized this is an adventure filled with danger and intrigue. I read about Paul's journeys through Turkey, Greece, and Italy. There was even a shipwreck. And though it is called Acts of the Apostles, it is really the Acts of the Holy Spirit.

In Acts 19, we find this: **Paul took a route through the interior and came to Ephesus, where he found some disciples. He asked them, “Did you receive the Holy Spirit, when you came to believe?” They replied, “We’ve not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit.”** Sometimes, we fail to see the bible as this treasure map that is leading us forward in the journey of the Holy Spirit and we live in the stream of life, letting the currents determine where we are going and never experience the power of the wind – because we have not examined the map.

2. Seek the Direction of the Wind When I opened the book on sailing, it told me the first step before ever getting in the boat is paying attention to the weather conditions. What is the direction of the wind? I have this tendency to move and try to make things happen. On the gifts inventory, my number one gift is activator – come on let's go – if it's going to happen, we've got to make it happen – and what I've learned is that I can get ahead of God. I act more like a motorboat than a sailboat. In the Old Testament book of Zechariah, the prophet Zechariah was speaking to King Zerubbabel who was trying to get the temple rebuilt now that the people were returning from exile – and Zechariah says – you are no David or even Solomon and not because you aren't trying. What's the problem? **'Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit,' says the LORD Almighty.** Whether we are sailing or living in the Holy Spirit, we must seek the direction of the wind. Sailors look at the direction of the wind before pushing off. They check the flags. They watch the other boats on the water. You don't want to be dead in the water. God, through the Holy Spirit will tell you things you cannot get any other way, but it requires taking time to listen.

Last week, I read about Spencer Case, an Army journalist and avowed atheist. One night while listening to a mortar attack in Iraq and wondering where the next mortar would hit, he felt the urge to kneel down and pray. He wrote that it was no surprise to him that an atheist would be moved to pray while under attack. But what he did not expect was later, while staring up at the stars, he offered this prayer: *Dear God, I have come to the conclusion you probably don't exist, but I've also come to the conclusion that any one view I hold may turn out to be mistaken... so if you are there, you know where to find me.* And he said that he had to take a good long look at what he had been walking away from. Are we listening? Are we taking the time to seek the direction of the Wind? Jesus said, “When the Spirit comes, he will guide you into all truth.” Every morning I want to get up early enough to listen – and sometimes it is as early as 4:00 because I've got something to attend to before my day begins. I don't want to wait until night to hear

where I should have gone, but I've got to get direction for the day. We worship on the first day of the week to listen for the order for the rest of the week. How do I know what it is if I have not stopped long enough to listen? God wants us to know. God wants us to have direction.

3. Yield to the Wind We must yield to the direction of the Wind. God will never force you to go in a direction you are unwilling to go. Hear that again: God will never force you to go in a direction you are unwilling to go. God never puts his hand on the tiller. The tiller is the steering wheel of the boat. It's your hand that is on the tiller. Sometimes we want to say: "God, will you steer this boat?" But that's not how God works. God doesn't do that for us. Recently I was on the phone with our youngest daughter, and I realized what she wanted was for me to take over – "Dad, can you just come here and fix it?" And when life gets messy or uncertain or scary, we want God to take over, but God always lets us choose. Even when God knows what's best, even when God knows the option we have chosen will hurt us – God does not prevent us from that. God will never override your will. What God wants is for you to surrender to the wind.

In Mark's gospel, we find the story of a time when Jesus was walking through the town of Jericho, and a blind man named Bartimaeus called, "Jesus, have mercy on me." And the people said, shut up Bartimaeus, don't you know that Jesus is passing through and Bartimaeus said, that's why I'm calling out. He knew he needed Jesus. "Jesus, have mercy on me." And Jesus heard him and said, "What do you want me to do for you?" Do you think Jesus didn't know what would be best for Bartimaeus – what Bartimaeus needed most? God supplies the wind but it's your hand that's on the tiller. What do you want? So, I called my daughter and said, You've got to ask for help. Does anybody know the help that you need? You need other people to come alongside you. Have you told your small group what you are facing? You've got to tell somebody. Sometimes we need others to help us act.

Yield to the Wind. But we procrastinate. When I was a child, Saturday morning was time to clean – and my mother would say, clean your room, and I would say, can't I do it later? But she knew me well enough to know that later meant I wouldn't do it. She said, do it now. Jesus wants us to yield to the wind, but we make excuses. In Luke's gospel, we are told that a man came to Jesus, and Jesus said to him, "Follow me." But the man replied, "First let me go and bury my father." And Jesus said, "Let the dead bury the dead." Jesus wasn't being uncaring, but he knew there will always be excuses. When the wind blows, it's time to yield to the wind. Don't miss the opportunity – in life or in relationships. Do it now. A few years ago, I asked someone if he would take me sailing – and he called me a few times and each time I said I couldn't because I had something else to do. And now that person no longer lives in this area.

We don't control the wind. The wind – the Spirit is a gift. But we must learn the language, seek the direction of the wind, and then yield to the wind – remembering that it's your hand on the tiller. You choose. Life is short. Let's not miss the adventure of a Spirit powered life.

Grow, Pray, Study for the Week of May 16, 2021

Weekly Prayer: O God of rushing wind, break into my life and reveal yourself anew so that I will know your gracious love. Give me a spirit of generosity so that in all I do, I will honor you and show forth your grace. Amen.

Monday, May 17

Scripture: John 3:5-8

Jesus answered, "I assure you, unless someone is born of water and the Spirit, it's not possible to enter God's kingdom. Whatever is born of the flesh is flesh, and whatever is born of the Spirit is spirit. Don't be surprised that I said to you, 'You must be born anew.' God's Spirit blows wherever it wishes. You hear its sound, but you don't know where it comes from or where it is going. It's the same with everyone who is born of the Spirit."

Observation: God created each of us for grand adventure, and the adventures of sailing provide a powerful metaphor for the disciplines of life in the Spirit. Jesus compares a life empowered by the Holy Spirit to the wind. Sailing is an appropriate metaphor because sailing is not an easy task; it takes work, time, desire, and discipline to do it successfully. Living by the Holy Spirit's power and purpose also takes time, desire, work, and discipline. But once you begin to understand the Spirit's power and direction for your life, you will begin to tap into the adventurous life God has planned for you to accomplish.

Application: Have you ever been sailing? If so, how would you describe the work it takes to do it successfully? When a Pharisee named Nicodemus came to Jesus, wanting to know how he could experience the life that Jesus offered, Jesus told him he would know when he experienced the wind of God's Spirit. What has been your favorite adventure in life so far? What has been your most exciting adventure with God?

Prayer: Holy Spirit, come. Help me to sense your presence and feel that you are moving in my life. I want to be living the life Jesus promised, to be fully and completely available to God. Come, Holy Spirit, come. Amen.

Tuesday, May 18

Scripture: Psalm 119:105; Acts 19:1-2

Your word is a lamp before my feet and a light for my journey.

While Apollos was in Corinth, Paul took a route through the interior and came to Ephesus, where he found some disciples. He asked them, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you came to believe?" They replied, "We've not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit."

Observation: The first step in beginning to understand how the Holy Spirit works is to learn all you can about God so that you begin to understand how to move with God. Just as sailing has specific terms for specific actions, you must get yourself into the Scriptures to begin realizing what is rightfully yours as a child of God. Just like finding a treasure map, God's word contains the actions, steps, promises, and power that you need to know. And it's in living it out that God can begin to show you the life and purpose God has for you.

Application: Which better describes the Word in your life: a lamp for your daily life or a match you strike when times get tough? How can you improve your time in the Bible? As you read the Bible, listen for what speaks to you. Meditate on today's scripture. What do you think God is saying to you through these verses of Scripture?

Prayer: Thank you, God, for the promises of scripture. Written long ago, your Spirit can bring life to these words in a way that speaks to what I experience today. Help me to be patient in listening and ready to be shaped by you. Amen.

Wednesday, May 19

Scripture: Zechariah 4:6; Jeremiah 33:3; John 16:13

He answered me: "This is the LORD's word to Zerubbabel: Neither by power, nor by strength, but by my spirit, says the LORD of heavenly forces."

Call to me and I will answer and reveal to you wondrous secrets that you haven't known.

However, when the Spirit of Truth comes, he will guide you in all truth. He won't speak on his own, but will say whatever he hears and will proclaim to you what is to come.

Observation: The second step in Holy Spirit living is to become less self-reliant and more Spirit-driven. A sailboat can only move quickly and forcefully if it moves in the direction the wind is blowing. To live your life in the power of the Holy Spirit, you too must seek the 'wind' and let the Spirit take you in the direction the Spirit is going. How do you seek the Spirit's direction? First, begin listening intently for God's voice. And secondly begin discerning the movement of the Holy Spirit by the signs of God you see around you whether through other people, God at work in people's lives, or places where God's work is being done.

Application: During today's devotion time, take an extended time just to listen. What are the thoughts that come to mind? At the end of this time, make note of what has come to mind. Are these thoughts consistent with what you find in scripture?

Prayer: Gracious God, calm my anxious heart and help me to set aside my thoughts so that I may listen, truly listen for you. Grant me the wisdom to know when you are speaking through my thoughts. Amen.

Thursday, May 20

Scripture: James 4:2; 2 Corinthians 6:2; Luke 9:59-62

You long for something you don't have, so you commit murder. You are jealous for something you can't get, so you struggle and fight. You don't have because you don't ask.

He says, *I listened to you at the right time, and I helped you on the day of salvation.* Look, now is the right time! Look, now is the day of salvation!

Then Jesus said to someone else, "Follow me." He replied, "Lord, first let me go and bury my father." Jesus said to him, "Let the dead bury their own dead. But you go and spread the news of God's kingdom." Someone else said to Jesus, "I will follow you, Lord, but first let me say good-bye to those in my house." Jesus said to him, "No one who puts a hand on the plow and looks back is fit for God's kingdom."

Observation: Once you begin to hear and discern the Spirit's direction for your life, you must obey and yield your will to God's will. In sailing you must maintain your hand on the tiller if you are to control the direction of the boat. You also will decide which direction you are going with your life and God will not override your will. But to live the life God desires means following the direction of the Spirit, not allowing procrastination or fear to inhibit the Spirit's work in and through your life.

Application: When have you yielded to God’s will? Sometimes it is only in looking back that we realize it was God’s Spirit that was directing us. What is the usual “But” that keeps you from following God’s directives or calling in your life? What is the Holy Spirit calling you to do today? Will you do it?

Prayer: Holy Spirit of God, make me aware of the ways you are moving in my life. Help me to prayerfully connect my thoughts with those indications of your presence. Let my life be a reflection of your will for me. Amen.

Friday, May 21

Scripture: Joel 2:28-30

After that I will pour out my spirit upon everyone; your sons and your daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, and your young men will see visions. In those days, I will also pour out my spirit on the male and female slaves. I will give signs in the heavens and on the earth—blood and fire and columns of smoke.

Observation: The Old Testament has many prophetic promises of a future time when God would do an amazing new thing on the earth. Before the time of Jesus, the Holy Spirit came upon specific individuals for a particular task and time. Anticipation, hope, and bewilderment must have been present within this Jewish nation.

Application: What does the prophecy of Joel promise specifically? In verse 27 it says: You will know that I am in the midst of Israel, and that I am the Lord your God—no other exists. And in the verses before that Joel describes signs of God’s presence. What kind of emotion would such a prophecy create within the people? The fulfillment of this prophecy would take hundreds of years. In other words, what God promises may not be fulfilled immediately. But will you wait?

Prayer: Spirit of God, as a gentle breeze brings comfort on a warm summer day, so may your Spirit move in me. Give me the wisdom to know what you want for me. Then grant me the courage to respond. Amen.

Saturday, May 22

Scripture: John 14:15-27

“If you love me, you will keep my commandments. I will ask the Father, and he will send another Companion, who will be with you forever. This Companion is the Spirit of Truth, whom the world can’t receive because it neither sees him nor recognizes him. You know him, because he lives with you and will be with you. “I won’t leave you as orphans. I will come to you. Soon the world will no longer see me, but you will see me. Because I live, you will live too. On that day you will know that I am in my Father, you are in me, and I am in you. Whoever has my commandments and keeps them loves me. Whoever loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love them and reveal myself to them.” Judas (not Judas Iscariot) asked, “Lord, why are you about to reveal yourself to us and not to the world?” Jesus answered, “Whoever loves me will keep my word. My Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them. Whoever doesn’t love me doesn’t keep my words. The word that you hear isn’t mine. It is the word of the Father who sent me. “I have spoken these things to you while I am with you. The Companion, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything and will remind you of everything I told you. “Peace I leave with you. My peace I give you. I give to you not as the world gives. Don’t be troubled or afraid.

Observation: Jesus taught his disciples at length about the coming of the Holy Spirit. He encouraged and comforted them with the promise of the coming of the Spirit. In fact, Jesus instructed them that it is to their advantage that he be crucified, raised and ascend to the Father saying, "It is better for you if I go away."

Application: What are the specific things the Spirit is going to accomplish within his followers? How do these various ministries of the Holy Spirit become ours today?

Prayer: Spirit of the Living God, fall afresh on me. Melt me, mold me, fill me, use me. Spirit of the Living God, fall afresh on me. Amen.