

This spring has witnessed an unusually large number of tornadoes. Images of places such as Joplin, Missouri, Tuscaloosa, Alabama and the town of Mapleton here in Iowa are reminders of the force (sometimes deadly) wind can exert. Interviews with people in the affected areas recount that the sound of the fury was like hearing a speeding freight train passing overhead. The Apostles, and the Blessed Virgin Mary who, according to tradition, was also in the Upper Room in Jerusalem on the first Pentecost Day, must have been similar as they heard the wind howling outside their gathering space. Like the experience here in Iowa of the residents of Parkersburg in 2008, residents in Missouri and Alabama report being informed of household items and personal mementos caught up in the vortex of the tornado being found deposited on the ground some 40 to 60 miles away. In a similar way the rushing wind of the Holy Spirit in our reading from Acts impelled the apostles out of the room in which they were staying and the Gospel message began to be heard by people of every nation gathered in Jerusalem for the feast and in turn through them to countless others in the Mediterranean world, the ends of the earth in those days.

For all its forcefulness, there is another image of wind in today’s liturgy. In the gospel we are taken back to Easter night to the same Upper Room in Jerusalem as in Acts. Here the fearful apostles have fled and gathered behind a locked door. Into their midst of confusion and fear the Risen Jesus appears and “breathes” on them the gift of his Spirit. Unlike the turbulent wind in the reading from Acts, this experience of gently breathed words like a calming breeze, imparts peace amid life’s storm to those gathered who are afflicted by trouble, terror and confusion. Along with his breathed word of “Shalom/Peace” Jesus utters his words of mission and authority to his followers to continue his work of establishing the Kingdom of God by proclaiming the forgiveness of sins.

This Pentecost we are again the recipients of this gift, the forceful yet gentle wind of God the Holy Spirit. Like the wind in today’s reading from the Acts of the Apostles, the Holy Spirit impels us and deposits us into the situations of our world as we

experience it today, at home, here in our parish, at work, in the wider arenas of life with the same mission of proclaiming and continuing to establish God's kingdom through lives marked by forgiveness, justice, compassion, and love. We do this by opening our lives to the life-breath of the Holy Spirit through the unique gifts and talents with which each of us is endowed as St. Paul reminds us. An ancient tale from another tradition can help us understand this point.

One day a disciple asked the Holy One: "Where shall I look for Enlightenment?"

"Here," the Holy One said.

"When will it happen?"

"It is happening right now," the Holy One said.

"Then why don't I experience it?"

"Because you do not look," the Holy One said.

"What should I look for?"

"Nothing," the Holy One said. "Just look."

"At what?"

"Anything your eyes alight upon," the Holy One said.

"Must I look in a special kind of way?"

"No," the Holy One said. "The ordinary way will do."

"But don't I always look the ordinary way?"

"No, the Holy One said. "You don't."

"Why ever not?" the disciples demanded.

"Because to look, you must be here," the Holy One said. "You're mostly somewhere else."

"Wind of God, keep on blowing. Sail over the barriers that we build to divide ourselves from each other. Pick up your seeds of freedom and truth wherever they flourish, carry them across frontiers to be planted in other soil, to begin fresh growth and new forms. Pour out your Spirit upon us and grant to us a new vision of your glory; a new faithfulness to your Word; a new consecration to your service; that your life may grow among us, and your kingdom come; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.