

Many Gifts, One Spirit
 Acts 2:1-4
 1 Corinthians 12:3b-13
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One of our children's neighborhood playmates, Philip, was about 4. His family was very religious, and sometimes the children would exchange preschool theology. One day Philip came over announcing to our family, "I know where God is!" And so, we asked, "Where?" And Philip puffed himself up and proudly answered, "God is in the wind!"

It must have been at the end of May or early in June, near Pentecost, and he would have heard the reading of the scripture in Acts about the rush of a violent wind and tongues of fire. Or maybe he learned God's whereabouts from Genesis when in the beginning of time "darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters," (Gen. 1:2). Or when "God formed man out of the dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life (Gen. 2:7), or when in a puff of air and fire God appeared to Moses out of a burning bush (Exodus 3:2).

A rabbi friend of mine reminds us that the name Yahweh, for God, would not be pronounced aloud by observing Jews. The word is spelled in Hebrew without vowels (YHWH), and means something like "I am," but if uttered it would have sounded like a breath of air: "Yah—weh!" "God is in the wind!"

This spirit of God that came to Abraham and Moses, and to the prophets, came to Jesus' disciples in the community gathered in Jerusalem fifty days after Passover (after resurrection) at the time of the Jewish Festival of Weeks. But this time, the Holy Spirit came over a whole crowd of people, and the wind ignited a fire in each person that spread and became the movement we call the early church.

This wind of God blows here in Rohnert Park too. Sometimes when I open my door and walk out off the porch as I'm coming over to church, I can *smell* the wind! (You know the smell I mean?) That smell of fertility and productivity, a smell of God's creation.

We know something's happening, something with growth and change. Paul said in 1 Corinthians, "God activates" the varieties of gifts. We are created with gifts, but it takes the Spirit to activate these gifts.

I can say that I have felt this wind of God's Spirit activating your gifts here at St. John's these two years while I have been your pastor. Paul mentions nine gifts of the spirit: **wisdom, knowledge, faith, healing, miracles, prophesy, discernment, tongues, and interpretation of tongues**. St. John's has them all.

When I think of **wisdom**, I think of Marilyn Jacobi, who passed away a year and a half ago. Even before my coming, Dave Bunje, one of your former pastors, told me about Marilyn. She was a fixture here. When the church first met in the park 32 years ago, Marilyn caught

the wind of the spirit. She was a charter member of St. John's and had the wisdom to know what church means. The church meant everything to her. It was her lifeblood. She had her seat and she was in it at every event, religiously. She knew that the more she put into the church, the more she got out of it. So she was at NOAH and the UMW bazaar, with her hand-crocheted towels, and at every meeting and at every worship service. She knew that in giving we experience God's love in return. She even put St. John's in her will, so that her gifts could keep on giving.

When I think of **knowledge**, I think of the Trustees (who have knowledge I certainly don't have), who blow in at all hours of the day and night, to mow the field, build signs, plant, repair, estimate, and arrange for the church's physical needs. And I also think of our other experts—our staff, who keep the office running smoothly, plan and prepare music, and care for our children. Everyday, I think of our volunteers, who join in the music and the projects, and the teaching and leading, and share their gifts in so many ways. And I think of our financial people who write checks and keep records and invest in accounts, such that we use our resources wisely.

When I think of **faith**, I think of people like Jean Navarro, whose faith sustains her. She always wants to pray for others, not herself. She is not afraid of the future, she's not afraid to die, when the time comes. On Mother's Day, Jean called the church from the hospital to wish all the mothers a "Happy Mother's Day." (She isn't even a mother!) She has faith in God and faith in the people of St. John's. This will always be her home. Some of you have been caring for Jean's yard and picking her beautiful flowers to take to her. When you do that, think of the breeze in the rose bushes as God's spirit.

When I think of **healing**, I think of Angels on Call—that's all of you who respond to the call to take a meal, or give a ride. I think of those who are on the prayer chain, or those who knit prayer shawls or call people who are shut-in. I think of the people who linger at coffee time after church for the purpose of connecting with someone who might need to talk. I think of all the folks who are here *for others and their needs*.

When I think of **miracles**, one amazing one comes to mind. One day in a gust of wind, into the office swept a family, a bit frail, for they had just lost their father and husband. They wanted a pastor to conduct a small memorial service that Friday. It was already Wednesday. I invited them in to talk. We decided we could arrange this, that we would plan the service right then and there. So first I asked about the man who had died, Ed Johnston. They started telling me his life story. When we got to his adult years, I learned that President Eisenhower had appointed Ed to be the Governor of the Territory of Hawaii, and then President Nixon had appointed Ed to be the High Commissioner of the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands. And my eyes are popping out, and I stop taking notes and listen intently, realizing that I had known this man! I had been to his home and had shaken his hand when I was a Peace Corps Volunteer in Micronesia. I had taught English at the Catholic mission school where his daughters attended, and I knew every beach on the island of Saipan, which his family so loved. We spoke of island life, we invited the family's Fijian caregiver and choir from First UMC, Santa Rosa to sing at the service, and there were leis of sweet-smelling flowers, and we could almost feel the warm island breezes flowing

through this room.

When I think of **prophecy**, I think of the pastors who preceded me here at St. John's. I am grateful for John Kienitz who was St. John's first pastor, in 1978. (Did you ever call him St. John?) Even in skilled nursing care, John remains a faithful servant of this church. After John, came another John, John Foster, who came back and served communion with me on our 30th anniversary. Then Dave Bunje, already a mutual friend of ours, spoke at the 30th anniversary party. Stephanie Bush and Karen McClintock followed, leading the way for subsequent women in ministry. Barbara Smith came next—then Philip Kim. Mike Turgeon was here the longest, 7 years. (Mike now serves the Windsor church.) Then Dennis Taber, and after he became ill, Jim Current. I give thanks for each of these pastors who served this church with dedication and love, prophesying a strong future for St. John's.

When I think of **discernment**, I think of the Bishop and Cabinet who had the foresight to purchase this land on Snyder Lane in 1964. And then I think of that group of 14 citizens of Rohnert Park, who gathered together in a living room in the year 1977 to plan for a church start. Without a building, they met in the park in A section, then in a Boy Scout hut, carrying the hymnals and bibles around in big coffin-like boxes, and finally built this multi-purpose space in 1983. The church, though, was never the building. The church was the people with a dream, gathering in the name of the spirit.

When I think of **tongues**, I think of the time the Fijian Choir sang here in the summer, and how the singers arrived throughout the service, and someone's cell phone kept going off, and how we feasted on a marvelous lunch the Fellowship Team came up with and served outside in front on the grass. That was a day of shared hospitality, cultural exchange, and songs in different languages—many gifts, one spirit. Today the Biteng family will share a song from their language, Tagalog.

Even though most of us do not speak Tagalog, we know that song, don't we? We know the message! It is like on Pentecost when the disciples could understand one another even though speaking in different tongues!

When I think of **the interpretation of tongues**, I think of all the conversations we've had about the meaning of faith, the bible, and the important questions of life. These conversations have happened in the narthex after the service, over food, on the phone, in small groups, by email, and on Facebook. And I'm sure they've happened without my knowledge in the parking lot or at your kitchen table.

When Paul was speaking in his letter to the people of Corinth, he wanted to make a point, that *all* gifts are important. They *all* contribute to the common good. We are *all* one body, with many parts. It doesn't matter if you are old or young, blue-collar or white-collar, native-born or foreign-born, gay or straight! It doesn't matter! We are all one body.

One of my favorite quotes is by Mahatma Gandhi: "I do not want my house to be walled in on all sides and my windows to be stuffed. I want the cultures of all the lands to be blown about my house as freely as possible." Gandhi also said, "I am sure that if [Jesus] were

living now..., he would bless the lives of many who perhaps have never even heard his name, if only their lives embodied the virtues of which he was a living example on earth: the virtues of loving one's neighbor as oneself and of doing good and charitable works among one's fellow men" (in Stephen Mitchell, *The Gospel According to Jesus: A New Translation and Guide to His Essential Teachings For Believers and Unbelievers*, 294). This openness is the spirit of Pentecost.

It's in the wind! God's all-inclusive spirit is in the wind! It is a wind that blows through a crowd of Jews and gentiles. It recognizes no partiality! It blows and ignites fires...and we have a men's breakfast group—and attending it even for a couple of times, a young man with piercings and tattoos, no less, and a men's spirituality group with guys talking about things in their lives that they may never have talked about before! The wind blows... and we have folks who may not come to church every week, but they come when they are going to have surgery or are afraid a relative doesn't have long to live. The wind blows...and in walk folks with great ideas about a cookie ministry or ways to take down curtains and see our windows. The wind blows... and folks feel comfortable enough to be open about who they are and the gifts they have to share.

The feeling of Pentecost is a bit like a Farmers' Market. There's a mood of summer in the air. The smells of Indian curry and barbecue and fresh kettle corn waft through the air. The music is playing from one microphone, and then from another there's a different kind of music all together. Folks are milling around and stopping to chat with people they haven't seen for ages. Little children are running through the fountain. People have come by bike, by skateboard, and even if you come by car, and have to circle around and around to find a parking spot, it doesn't matter because it's the end of the week—TGIF! Kids are meeting their friends; school's out. Lovers are holding hands. Folks are loaded down with fresh vegetables and sampling cheeses and sliced peaches. It's a party with abundance of good things—the whole community is invited. This is Pentecost, with the spirit of God empowering us to be all we can be, together, in community. Let the wind blow, wild and free!