

Cross-winds at Pentecost

Colleagues,

All the “paid pastors,” and the intern too, at Bethel Lutheran (St. Louis) were attending our ELCA synod assembly on Pentecost last (June 4). So Sunday service leadership was handed over to two goldie oldie retirees, octogenarian Karl Boehmke (celebrant) and 70-something Ed Schroeder (preacher). We added 40-something Sherman Lee to make a troika, and (while the cat’s away, the mice will play) Sherm read a slice-of-(his own)life as one of the three lessons. Thereafter Sherm and I did a pas-de-deux “Crossings” sermon. It went like this: The Pentecost story (Acts 2) was the “grounding” text. Sherm’s slice-of-life was the second text, “tracking” his life at work and at home for the week just ended. Our sermon-duet was the “crossing,” weaving the two texts together.

Since Sherm is a Crossings community veteran, he knows the shout. Not only how the paradigm, the six-step Crossings matrix, works, even more he knows law/promise theology, the glue that holds the scheme together. So a good bit of my part of our sermon conversation was in the interrogative mood, with Sherm himself speaking the indicative sentences that did the crossing.

Sherm had written his “life-text” in advance and read it from the lectern as the second of the three readings for the Festival Day—Acts 2, the epistle from Sherman and then the Pentecost Gospel from John. I had composed a six-step sequence from the Acts 2 Pentecost text itself and that was printed in the service folder. We had agreed to use the “wind” of Acts 2 as our major metaphor, which is, of course, the root image of both the Hebrew and Greek words for Spirit. Our give-and-take sermon, tying the two texts together around this image—moving air, wind, breath,

the Holy Gust—was ad lib. We stood before the congregation (cum cordless mikes) and “just talked.”

Oh, yes, there was one visual aid. It sought to signal the job-description Jesus gives for the Holy Spirit in John’s Gospel for Pentecost: “He will testify on my behalf. . . he will take what is mine and declare it to you.” We placed a household box-fan on the baptismal font. Directly in front of it was the processional cross that one of our members had created for Easter this year, with Christ’s victory visualized by flowing streamers—gold, silver, red—attached to the multiple crossbars. When the fan was clicked on—as it was during the entire liturgy—it blew those victory streamers out toward the congregation. It might have been a bit hokey, but they got it.

At lunch thereafter, we reflected on what happened, asked which of us should “write it up.” Sherm volunteered. So here are the three pieces for this week’s ThTh:

*Ed’s six-steps for Acts 2,
Sherm’s slice-of-life,
Sherm’s reconstuction of how the stories went when we criss-crossed them into each other.*

Peace and Joy!

Ed Schroeder

GROUNDING

Acts 2 in a Crossings matrix

Diagnosis

1. *Daily Wind Pressure*
2. *Gets Inside*
3. *Get Blown Away*

A New Prognosis

4. *Cross-Wind of Easter and Pentecost*
5. *Getting This Second Wind*
6. *Blowing in the Second Wind*

TRACKING

Slice of Life

“Priorities. Get your priorities straight.” I remember my father lecturing me about that when I was about my children’s age. It was part of growing up, part of maturing. I think I’ve gotten pretty good at it, but it’s hard to tell. Obviously things seem to be going well, but that’s just on the surface. Everything seems to be in balance, but one little thing can upset that .

There’s so much that I need to do, so much I want to do, so much that’s expected of me and so little time. Time marches on relentlessly, or perhaps more accurately, it flows like water or wind. Most of the time it streams gently, but sometimes harshly, battering me around or stranding me in its wake, leaving me out of breath, out of sync, or simply just out of it.

Trying to keep priorities balanced is a lot like juggling, keeping all the balls in the air so nothing gets dropped. And life, like the wind, tends to shift – faster/slower, north/south, east/west, down/up – all the time. Most professional jugglers use heavy objects so that wind effect is negligible. But what if I’m juggling wiffleballs on a windy day, or if the wind kicks into hurricane or tornado mode? In

other words, what can I do when the speed of life blows my world out of its orbit so that I can't even tell which way is up? How can I keep priorities straight, without missing something important?

Like this week, when I remembered that I had promised to help Ed with this sermon and thought that I had had plenty of time to do it. Like all busy weeks, this wasn't the best time to pile on with another special project. And this week was worse because all four-day work weeks [Memorial Day holiday had "taken" Monday] require five days of productivity. And the end of the month [Wednesday was May 31] always means extra project deadlines. On top of this, our air conditioner at home broke down; thankfully we've been sleeping at a neighbor's cool house, but even this requires extra planning and extra time. And then after my planning session with Ed I went to the dentist to diagnose some recent severe pain – yup, an emergency root canal. Dead stop for productivity. I was just happy to remove the recurring pain and numb the post-operative pain, return to normal biological function, forget about trying to get things done.

How to deal with this?

Of course, I could sleep less, but that's not enough. Something else has got to give, things aren't going to get done, balls are going to get dropped. I'm not the kind of person to simply not care and ignore everything. And I'm not the kind of person who will sacrifice myself to get everything done. I do know that somehow with God's love, I can try my best and everything will be all right. Like that common saying "Let go and let God." But even having the knowledge that God forgives me my sins and that the footprints in the sand – the two sets (mine and Jesus) that taper to one set – are not Jesus abandoning me, but rather Jesus carrying me—well, I still feel like this not

getting everything done, in these tornadoes of ever-increasing deadlines and expectations, as calm as I appear on the outside, well, it's just killing me on the inside.

CROSSING

Daily Wind Pressure or Wind Shear

In the best of times, the most we can hope for is some sort of equilibrium of time demands vs. available time and energy. But all these demands, whether truly urgent or not, are like wind shear – the phenomenon of intense wind pushing everything into the ground. Unlike grounding us in Scripture, the wind shear pushes us into the ground, grinding us up. Although my slice of life barely touched on external symptoms, the palpable effects of wind-blown imbalance have included short temper, increased blood pressure, fatigue, and while actually giving my slice of life during the service – temporary dizziness – literally loss of balance.

Wind Gets Inside (Cutting Wind) or Vain Wind

In all the priorities, met and mostly unmet, I focus on a wind or spirit that is not God's. That's not to say that my needing to fulfill a commitment to my son's judo club or daughter's dance school, or especially completing office projects are not from God. But that I let them rule my thinking and let my obsession of the unfulfilled responsibilities haunt even the "downtime" moments is a harsh wind that cuts me to the core, like a polar blast. These obsessions are what I hang my heart on, or as Luther put it so well, those are my gods, false ones. And to add insult to injury, I try to take on all the responsibility myself: how vain of me to think I can go it alone. More harmful than the other false winds is the vain

wind, when I try to take the place of God in my life.

Get Blown Away or Dust in the Wind

Whenever I get to the third of the six Crossings steps I think of my many relatives and friends who do not know and/or accept God's gift to us in Christ. Because a lot of what I wrote above can be soothed by many things like meditation, therapy, heart-to-heart talk with a friend or a good night's sleep. But the truth is that I believe that God created me and does not intend for me to suffer from the above-mentioned "Wind Shear" or "Vain Wind." I believe that God does not intend for me to fall victim to false gods (including myself) but that I do leaves me with a big problem. The grinding wind pummels me so hard that I lose God's breath (from the same root words as spirit and wind) – literally and figuratively. I lose the breath of life, literally no in-spir-ation. I am totally blown away, no more than dust in the wind, as in ashes to ashes. And as big as my problem is to me, it's at least that big for God. God doesn't intend for me to be blown away as dust in this killing wind; God aspires (another "spirit" word) much more for me.

Cross Wind: Easter & Pentecost or the Breath of New Life

Again I think of my relatives and friends for whom God-in-Christ is not currently a choice or an option. They may know of the story of the Cross and the Resurrection but it's not something they've accepted for themselves. I can't tell them The Truth; all I can do is tell them what's true for me: that on that Cross, God-in-Christ slayed the killing winds. This Cross-Wind, with the Resurrection, provides the breath of new life. It's a new wind blowing, one that not only soothes, but eradicated the death and dying associated with the old winds.

Getting This Second Wind or Alive with Re-spir-ation

This life-renewing wind or spirit or breath takes the clay that I am and literally and figuratively blows into me, in-spires me, enables me to have fully functional respiration. I am no longer just clay and earth and water; I am breathing in/with/throughout the Spirit of God-in-Christ, the conqueror of the killing winds. No more shortness of breath; gone are the dizzy spells; I have the True Second Wind to sustain and nourish me through the chaos of the killing winds.

Blowing in the True Second Wind or the Holy Wind Vane

This sixth of the six Crossings steps is almost as hard to describe as the third. Who's to say that my outward calm demeanor is not the result of massage, meditation or bicycling, which all have restorative effects (for me)? It's not like I can go around telling people, that is the equivalent of shouting from the rooftops, "Hey I beat the over-scheduling stress problem with religion," or at least that's not how I'm wired. But if someone comments on how well I got through a rough patch, I can share this story, that is, how Christ's story intertwines with mine. Or if someone asks me what my weekend plans are and I tell them I'm going to be part of a sermon – well you never know exactly where that could lead, except it paves the way to share God's truth for me. And with the Spirit blowing in, through and around me (and not pushing me to the ground), with others I can share God's good news in my life and point the way to the True Second Wind – acting as a Holy Wind Vane, pointing The Way for others.