

Lent 2

Genesis 12:1-4; John 3:1-17

Show us Wind

First Mennonite Church

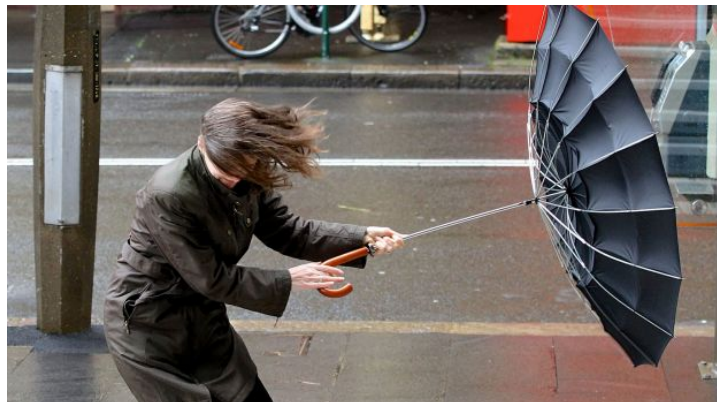


Have you ever watched the wind? Wind is nothing more than moving air and is caused by differences in air pressure within our atmosphere. Air under high pressure moves toward areas of low

pressure. The greater the difference in pressure, the faster the air flows.

Of course, you can't see the wind, but you can see what it does. Wind has power. It can blow roofs off buildings, blow down power lines and trees, and push around cars and trucks as this video shows.

Wind also moves people, can push us across the street and around the world. Has the wind ever pushed you around?



There must have been a strong breeze blowing around Abraham and Sarah's tent long ago. Abraham and Sarah were old. No children, therefore no one to pass on the family name and all of their earthly goods to. Then, one day, they heard the wind rattling against their tent, heard the whistle of it in their ears, saying *Go from your country and your*

kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you...so that you will be a blessing.

Nicodemus was a religious man, a leader within the Jewish community. He had met Jesus, seen the work Jesus had done, and heard Jesus preach. There was something about previous encounter with Jesus that had wormed its way into heart and soul—like that song you hear and then can't get out of your head. Maybe it was the way Jesus had interpreted a passage of scripture that was so different from what he had heard all of his life. Perhaps it was one of the signs Jesus had performed—turning water into wine at the wedding at Cana or his radical act of cleansing the temple. Whatever it was, something was eating away at Nicodemus, causing him to toss and turn in his sleep, waking him up at night. Some people say Nicodemus went to see Jesus at night—in secret—because he was frightened of his peers. I wonder whether it wasn't the wind that had blown so strong that it shook his soul to the point where he needed answers to his questions.

I know a 50-something year old woman. Several years ago, she celebrated her daughter's wedding, and then shortly after, quit her job, sold her house, and signed up with MCC to go teach English.

Many years ago, I decided to go to university. And it's interesting why I even thought about going there. Right after High School, I vowed never to attend school again. I didn't like it. Yet, one day, I packed up my belongings and moved.

What prompts a person in their 50s to suddenly sell their home, quit their job, and embark on an adventure of teaching English halfway around the world? What prompts seniors in their mid-70s to leave their homeland in the Ur of the



Chaldeans, to pack up all of their belongings and embark on an unknown journey? Why attend university when I vowed never to darken a school door again? What prompts an educated religious leader to seek out Jesus in the middle of the night to have a theological debate?

The short answer is the wind. Nicodemus wanted to know more about God's Kingdom. Where is it? If it's close to us, how do we see it? Jesus reminded Nicodemus to be open to the breeze:

The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. (John 3:8)

Abraham and Sarah were deeply concerned about three things:

- They were concerned about being able to survive as a people. God promised that they would become a great people!
- Second, they had no land and God promised them land!
- Third, Abraham and Sarah had no son to inherit their property and people, and God promised them a son.

The wind blew so hard that it knocked them out their retirement chairs, propelled them to pack up all of their belongings and leave. The wind propelled them outward on a journey away from their family and homeland.

How did Abraham and Sarah know it was God's wind, and not the wind of personal preference or the wind of indigestion? How did they know?

They didn't know. They didn't know God would be faithful, didn't know God would keep promises. The story tells us that it wasn't always easy for Abraham and Sarah to "keep the faith." They laughed at God when they were told about the birth of a son. They also didn't want to wait for God, so they tried to advance things on their own by having a child through Sarah's maid, Hagar. But these things only caused Abraham and Sarah grief.

Over the course of many years, they came to understand the breeze was God's Spirit. God protected them on their journey, even though they were in strange and hostile land. God gave them a son which partially fulfilled two of God's promises.

- **First**, a son fulfilled their need of who would inherit their property and people, and
- **second**, a son carried on the family name opening up the possibility the family would become a great nation.
- **Finally**, at the end of Sarah's life, Abraham bought the cave of Macpella, and took this as a sign that this tiny piece of property would someday belong to his descendants.

They stepped out in faith. Stepped into the unknown without a map or navigation system, trusting that the wind blowing in and through them was from God.

When I left my hometown for university to attend university, I didn't know the wind would blow me straight into the love of my life, then push the two of us on to a journey of living in Asia for 20 years, and back to Canada and here to FMC. Now, when I look back on my life, I see where God was active.

Often, we will hear confirmation through other people, provided our ears are open to hearing it.

It's unfortunate this story of Nicodemus' encounter with Jesus has been coopted by evangelistic services. In these types of services, this story is used to get those who aren't Christians to become Christians. We are told John 3:16 is the Gospel in a nutshell. The result of using this passage of scripture this way has allowed us, who are Christians, to sit comfortably knowing this story doesn't apply to us, but sure applies to those bad people over there.

I encourage you to put yourself into the shoes of Nicodemus. Nicodemus is a very religious man who knew his Bible backwards and forwards. He may have known every story off by heart. I bet he knew his Bible better than you or me.

While knowing your Bible is a very good thing, there's more to being a disciple than being able to recite John 3:16. As I've said in other sermons, it's not enough to simply quote the Bible when we encounter an important theological, moral or ethical issue.

Take for example the seemingly straightforward command: **Thou shalt not steal.** For many this command is perfectly clear. Thou shalt not steal. But what does it mean for you and me? Is it stealing if companies manufacture a product, let's say a running shoe, in the third world for a few dollars, and then sell that item for a 300% profit? Is that stealing? How we answer this question depends on our understanding of our economic system, where the shoe is made, who are the workers making the shoes, our understanding of the character of God, and some other things, too.

It is not enough to quote the Bible to your children, grandchildren or fellow church member. It is not enough to simply say, “well the Bible says...” What I’m trying to say with this illustration, “Thou shalt not steal”, is that that even where a biblical instruction seems crystal clear, written in black and white—that we need to be in relationship with Jesus, need the **guidance of God's Spirit to interpret and apply this command to our lives**. This requires not only an ability to read our Bibles carefully, but an ability to **listen, really listen** to what God’s Spirit is saying to us as we apply our faith to new situations and questions.

Stop for a moment and think back on your own life? Can you see moments where God showed you an answer to a nagging question, moved you to change your opinion on a troubling issue, pushed you out of your comfort zone and thrust you into an unfamiliar and uncomfortable place?

Here’s a story about one of our own, Esther, who died just over two years ago. When Esther was a young girl, she felt the wind blow into her life, calling her to ministry. Isn’t that wonderful and incredible that God spoke to her? I think it is. Except, there was a problem. The church of the day was not open to hearing, seeing, and thereby accepting and embracing what God’s Spirit was showing the church. The church back then was more like Nicodemus, eager to open their Bibles to the passage where Paul says women should be silent in the church. See, look at what the Bible says. But, as I’ve already said, it’s not enough to quote the Bible; we need the wind, need God’s Spirit to empower us to interpret the Bible and apply it to new situations.

If you get a chance, ask any female pastor what it was like for her to have God’s call within the context of a closed and resistant church. You may be surprised by what you hear.

The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes.

You see, when the wind blows it moves people. It propelled Esther into a life of ministry, even though it was difficult for her. Of course, it pushed Abraham and Sarah to leave their homeland for a precarious life as a sojourner. The wind pushed me out of my hometown and out into the wider world, something for which I’m grateful. But the wind does not just push people from one geographical place on a map to another. No, the wind blows into our hearts, minds, souls and thrusts us into new ways of being, new ways of thinking, and doing.

We can't see the wind, but we can see what it does. Initially, we may not know it's the wind of God blowing. The only way we will know is if we step out in faith, step out into the unknown in simple trust like Abraham and Sarah did so long ago.

Is the wind moving here in FMC? Is the wind blowing in your life? What is this earth-shaping, earth-transforming wind saying to us? In which direction is it telling us to go? God wants to show us.

This season of Lent, be open to the wind blowing. Be open even if it makes your pew uncomfortable. Be open to the possibility that the wind is calling us to new challenges, new ways of being, thinking, and doing. Thanks be to God.

Message

God is like the wind. You can't see it, but you can see what it does. God shows us what happens when the wind blows on and through Nicodemus and Abraham. It pushes them out of familiar and comfortable places, pushes them into new challenges, new ways of being, thinking, and doing. Show us what your wind can do for us this Lenten season.