

# WEEK 9: Wind

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This week we finish our three-part series on the use of natural elements as metaphor in the Bible. This final week we are looking at the idea of “wind.” As in our last two weeks, wind is used across the entire spectrum of metaphor. It can personify God but most often it is used in association with the forces that affect human behavior, both good and bad.

You might have noticed over the last two weeks that wind seems to accompany other nature forces in the Bible. Those are the moments to really pay attention to in the text. Whenever we find them they have something to say about the power of God or the three facets of the Trinity – Father, Son and Holy Spirit. In Genesis 1 our first image of God the Creator (Father) is that of a wind sweeping over the face of the waters (Gen. 1:2). In the Gospels, the introduction John the Baptist gives to Jesus is that of one who does not baptize with water but with fire and the Holy Spirit (Matt 3:11-12; Mark 1:8; Luke 3:16). In Acts 2, the Holy Spirit descends upon the disciples as a violent rushing wind filling the room where they sat after which tongues of fire appear resting on their heads (Acts 2:2-3).

- God the Father                      Wind Water
- God the Son                         Water Fire
- God the Holy Spirit                Wind Fire

The nice thing about the use of natural metaphors is that we can visualize them. We have all experienced the nuisance it can be to ride a bike into the wind or walk across a parking lot with the wind messing up our hair or threatening to rip out of our hands anything that is not secure. We have felt the refreshing cool breeze off the ocean, the parching, almost life diminishing dry southern winds moving across a desert. Some of us have even witnessed first-hand the devastation caused by tornado and hurricane force winds. We will explore all these themes this week and, who knows, you might even see a few munchkins and flying monkeys along the way... And since it is the last week of our daily devotionals, the “road we are following” will take us all over the Bible and into books you may have never even opened.

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## Monday

1 Kings 19:11  
Acts 2:2

## Tuesday

Jonah 1:4  
Luke 8:24

## Wednesday

Job 27:21  
Exodus 10:13  
Jonah 4:8  
Song of Sol. 4:16

## Thursday

Ecclesiastes 1:17; 4:6  
Proverbs 11:29  
Jeremiah 5:13

## Friday

John 3:8  
Sirach 16:20-21  
James 1:6

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# Monday

*He said, 'Go out and stand on the mountain before the Lord, for the Lord is about to pass by.' Now there was a great wind, so strong that it was splitting mountains and breaking rocks in pieces before the Lord (1 Kings 19:11) And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. (Acts 2:2)*

Wind is perhaps the force of nature most associated with God. In Hebrew, the word for wind is the same word used for spirit (ruach) and it literally means "breath." The God of the Hebrew Bible was known as being both unnamed and unseen. There was never any image made to capture a likeness of God and in fact it was a violation of the Torah, punishable by death, if you were to even try. While unnamed and unseen, we see multiple instances in the Old Testament where God was heard. The wind was believed to be the mechanism through which God spoke. It was the "breath" of God that brought creation into existence in Genesis Chapter 1. It was also that holy breath of God (ruach hakodesh) that spoke to Moses and the prophets of the Old Testament.

Our scripture passages for today are two of the most powerful images of the breath of God shown in a mighty wind. The first comes from the story of the prophet Elijah. If you remember from our devotional on the wilderness, Elijah had fled there in fear of King Ahab and Queen Jezebel. He had just killed 450 prophets of pagan god Ba'al (Jezebel was a priestess of Ba'al) and was overcome by fear of what might happen to him. God led Elijah to a mountain top to show him His full presence.

Sometimes, instead of trying to find meaning today in a scripture from thousands of years ago, I try to imagine myself in that scene. Like Elijah, I am often afraid, not sure if I can really trust that God will protect me. But God hears my cry and, in my presence, and only my presence, He rushes through a mountain pass in a wind with such force that it rips rocks from the ground in its wake. I think if I had witnessed such an event there would never be any doubt in my mind of the power of God.

Likewise, imagine you are in that room with the disciples. To your relief and amazement Jesus had risen from the dead. You were so elated to be with Him again but then He ascended into heaven. He left you, told you not to worry, but you are not so sure. As you sit there with your friends not knowing what is next, a mighty wind, the holy breath (ruach hakodesh) of God, rushes through the enclosed room. Not only that, but you feel a presence inside of you, a presence that was said to have left Israel with the last of the prophets – that Holy Breath or Holy Spirit. It finally dawns on you what Jesus was preparing you for. You have become the "prophets" of a new Way – the Way of the Lord.

Sometimes it is good to be reminded that our God is an awesome God and through Her all things are possible. Next time you feel the wind at your back or in your face remember that we serve that same God that spoke to Moses, Elijah and the disciples and that the same holy breath was promised to us as well through the Holy Spirit.

Peace (Shalom)

# Tuesday

*But the Lord hurled a great wind upon the sea, and such a mighty storm came upon the sea that the ship threatened to break up. (Jonah 1:4)*

*They went to him and woke him up, shouting, 'Master, Master, we are perishing!' And he woke up and rebuked the wind and the raging waves; they ceased, and there was a calm. (Luke 8:24)*

In ancient times, only God was said to have the ability to control nature. This stems back to the creation story in Genesis 1 and 2. It stood to reason that only the One who created the forces of nature can control them. Because of that, it would make sense that the positive aspects of nature were seen to be blessings from God, and likewise anything destructive to be a sign of an angry God. Today we understand weather patterns differently and view these stories more for the underlying pictures that they paint.

In our texts we see examples of storms, the combination of wind and water, and viewing them as punishment would be to miss the enormity of the message. In the first text, we join the prophet Jonah as he is trying to escape the presence of God. God had spoken to Jonah and told him to go to Nineveh, to travel north over land to the capital city of the Assyrians. Instead Jonah boards a boat setting sail southward – the exact opposite direction of where God told him to go. The Lord then sends a “reminder” to Jonah, speaking through the wind. What is interesting about this story is that each of the sailors on the boat with Jonah looked to their own pagan gods and their initial response, no surprise, was that of fear. Also interesting is that this scene finds Jonah asleep (literally and figuratively) and once awakened he is not surprised nor afraid of how God is trying to get his attention. Once Jonah listens, the storm is abated.

In the New Testament passage, we are again on a boat. This time the disciples are fearful, and it is Jesus who is asleep. The wind rocks the boat and I imagine the disciples were asking each other which one of them might have done something to have angered God. Again, to think this wind was an act of anger is to misread the message of the text. The awakened Christ calms not only the wind but the disciples, and by commanding the wind, the disciples see an amazing truth. In that time, there were many great teachers, there were prophets and ones who performed miracles, none of which were as insightful, loving and commanding as Jesus, but this “miracle” did something more. As we said, only God could control the elements of nature. By doing so, Jesus revealed to His disciples that He was more than the Son of Man, the Son of David, or the Messiah. He was also God!

Peace (Shalom)

# Wednesday

*The east wind lifts them up and they are gone; it sweeps them out of their place. (Job 27:21)*

*So Moses stretched out his staff over the land of Egypt, and the Lord brought an east wind upon the land all that day and all that night; when morning came, the east wind had brought the locust. (Exodus 10:13)*

*When the sun rose, God prepared a sultry east wind, and the sun beat down on the head of Jonah so that he was faint and asked that he might die. He said, 'It is better for me to die than to live.' (Jonah 4:8)*

*Awake, O north wind,  
and come, O south wind!  
Blow upon my garden  
that its fragrance may be wafted abroad.  
Let my beloved come to his garden,  
and eat its choicest fruits. (Song of Solomon 4:16)*

There were many different types of sacrifices offered by the Children of Israel to God. Many of those offerings required an animal to be sacrificed and then for it to be placed on an altar and burned. One specific offering, the burnt offering (olam in Hebrew), was the best known and represented a total submission to God. This offering was to be entirely consumed by fire, whereas others include partaking of the parts of the animal as food for those offering the sacrifice, such that it became a sacred act as well as an act of hospitality. The Hebrew root of *olam* means "that which goes up," the idea being that the smoke of the offering would rise to the heavens and would be pleasing to God.

The laws of sacrifice were given to Moses on Mount Sinai as recorded in Exodus 20 and detailed in Leviticus chapters 1 through 7, but our passages today come from accounts of burnt offering that were offered to God prior to the giving of the law. Each of these are very powerful and significant moments in the text, giving us a deeper insight into this type of offering. This observance was first used by Noah when he offered a sacrifice to God to seal the promise (covenant) that God would never again destroy the world by Flood. The second observance is the call of Abraham to offer his son Isaac as a sacrifice representing Abraham's unending faith. The third observance is that of Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, making an offering of praise to God for delivering the Children of Israel from the hand of Pharaoh.

In the times of Jesus, Rabbis started teaching that the fire of the burnt offering not only caused the smoke to "go up" to God, but it also gave way to the soul and mind of the one offering the sacrifice to ascend (go up) to be in communion with God. This turned out to be very important and it is doubly so for us today. You see, sacrifices could only be offered at the Temple, so when it was destroyed in 70 AD, sacrifice could no longer be offered. While the fire no longer allows that offering to ascend, burnt offerings were replaced by prayer and acts of kindness. Today, when you pray, remember that you are offering up something sacred, sweet smelling, to God which puts you in communion with Her.

Peace (Shalom)

# Thursday

*And I applied my mind to know wisdom and to know madness and folly. I perceived that this also is but a chasing after wind. (Ecclesiastes 1:17)*

*Better is a handful with quiet  
than two handfuls with toil,  
and a chasing after wind. (Ecclesiastes 4:6)*

*The prophets are nothing but wind,  
for the word is not in them.  
Thus shall it be done to them! (Jeremiah 5:13)*

*Those who trouble their households will inherit wind,  
and the fool will be servant to the wise. (Proverbs 11:29)*

In today's passages we look at how the Bible uses wind as a metaphor for foolish pursuit. Think about the phrase "chasing the wind" for a second. Ever try to do that? Frankly, I am not sure how you would even start! As we read with its use in describing God, the wind is invisible, its presence is known by feeling its movement or witnessing its effect on the movement of other things such as the trees in our yard or wind chimes we have hanging on our porch.

The Book of Ecclesiastes in the Old Testament is one of the Books of Wisdom. It is said to be a collection of experiential wisdom – based on actual moments that the author went through and then reflected on their meaning. The first several chapters of the book have to do with the forces of nature and in our selected passages the author is referencing the times when life is an endless pursuit, toiling day after day, and in the end with nothing to show for it. As if he were "chasing the wind."

The next two passages are akin to a description you might have heard for people who talk a lot but don't really say anything, or what they say is untrue. We use phrases like "blow-hard," "wind bag," or "full of hot air" to add to this metaphor of wind. In the passage from Jeremiah, the prophet is warning the people of Jerusalem not to listen to the many false prophets who are telling them what they want to hear, for there is nothing but air in what they say (and we say the Old Testament is not relevant today).

The passage from the Book of Proverbs is even more relevant today in these times of global pandemic. It might be familiar to those of you who have taken an American Literature class. It is from the play, "Inherit the Wind," written in the 1950s as a political statement on the issue of McCarthyism. McCarthyism is a term coined to mean the practice of making accusations without evidence to back it up. It was coined based on the behavior of Senator Joseph McCarthy who, in the 1950s, accused many prominent citizens

of the United States (writers, artists, actors, academics) of being communists without any evidence. In the play that takes its name from this verse in Proverbs, one of the main characters, a lawyer, uses this quote during a rebuttal to a fundamentalist preacher's damning comments of a local schoolteacher from the pulpit of his church. This is not its only use in classic literature. This metaphor is also used in the book, Don Quixote by Miguel de Cervantes, to illustrate the foolish behavior of the main character by depicting him as one who does battle with windmills.

These passages speak to the foolishness of chasing after things or listening to people that blow back and forth like the wind. They have no basis in truth, and following them in the end provides no reward – only frustration. This is where I think it is important to remember the Hebrew word for wind, ruach, and what it means at its core – breath. When the wind blows, is it breathing life into you? Or is it tossing you about, scorching you or leading you astray? If so, then you are not feeling the true-life giving wind, the breath of God. Let those distracting winds blow past.

Peace (Shalom)

# Friday

*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. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.' (John 3:8)*

*But no human mind can grasp this, and who can comprehend his ways? Like a tempest that no one can see, so most of his works are concealed (Sirach 16:20-21)*

*But ask in faith, never doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind; (James 1:6)*

In our last scriptural texts of the week, we look at wind in context of our faith. As you will notice with each of these passages, the objective of the wind is not to misguide, but rather to test. Also, one of our texts is from a collection of Hebrew writings that were not included in the Hebrew Bible but were used by the writer of the Gospel of John as source material.

Our first passage, taken from the Gospel of John, is part of a story only found in that gospel, Jesus' encounter with Nicodemus. You probably remember him to be a "wee little man" sitting in a sycamore tree so he could hear Jesus, but Nicodemus was a prominent Pharisee, a leader in the temple. He was stirred by the message of Jesus but also had many questions. This story in John chapter 3 describes the encounter and is the lead-in to one of the most quoted verses of the New Testament – John 3:16.

The first time you read it, you might be just as puzzled as Nicodemus was! The verse seems rather obtuse and if you read the verse prior, Jesus had just told him that he needed to be reborn. You can see why Nicodemus might have been very perplexed by what Jesus was saying. This is where the reference to the writings of Sirach come into play.

The book of Sirach was a series of writings dated around the 1st and 2nd centuries BCE that combined the sayings of Ecclesiastes and Proverbs with the law of the Torah. The basic premise of this text was that the concept of Wisdom (often a female personification of the words of God) was looking for a place to dwell and choosing the Children of Israel. According to Sirach, Wisdom came to permanently dwell in the Temple of Jerusalem. The Gospel of John uses this passage from Sirach to again speak of the Wisdom of God being part of the message that Jesus brought to us in his earthly ministry.

If you compare the verses, the concept of wind is again used (i.e., tempest in Sirach). What both authors are saying, and John brings home, is the fact that this wisdom, the divine presence of God, again inhabits human-kind and in doing so it is like a mighty and unpredictable wind. This time however, the wind is not blowing past us or swirling around us or tossing us back and forth. This wind is part of us, it is that presence of God inhabiting us.

The text from Sirach also says something very important about Wisdom, that we cannot comprehend it – it is beyond our human understanding. Maybe right now you are reading this and are just as confused as Nicodemus was – wind, wisdom, rebirth?????

It is in those moments that faith becomes important. Faith, the assurance of things hoped for, the evidence of things unseen (Hebrews 11:1) is what guides us not only when the winds of folly and deception blow us but also when the winds of wisdom blow us as well. How often do we find ourselves being tossed about? We see no possible way the situation could be of God only to look back and see how that moment was used by God to strengthen us. I know of many times in my life where the winds of God's wisdom blew me in a different direction, one that I at first fought against, but now see was truly Her moving as a divine wind within me steering me away from a path that would have been very dangerous.

Now we get to our last verse from the Book of James. I chose this book and this verse for a very particular reason, one that relates to our theme but also one that relates to a larger truth about the reading of biblical text: There are times when we read texts from the Bible and disagree with them. This is the case with the Book of James. It is controversial for several reasons but the beautiful thing about our Reformed heritage and PCUSA doctrine is that it is perfectly ok to feel that way. It is only when we struggle with texts that we can really look for deeper meaning.

In this text, we again see the use of wind and in the context of faith. However, this text creates a negative connotation associated with the doubt, implying that it is the opposite of faith. Doubt is very natural and not something to be looked upon as negative. As the author Anne Lamott puts it so eloquently:

“The opposite of faith is not doubt, but certainty. Certainty is missing the point entirely. Faith includes noticing the mess, the emptiness and discomfort, and letting it be there until some light returns.”

As Sarah reminded us in Worship in the House a few weeks ago, doubt is part of our development and maturity in faith. Without it we are stuck mirroring the faith of our parents or just repeating the narratives we heard in Sunday School without it being personal. Returning to the metaphor of the text, we NEED the wind to blow, it is what matures us. At the time we don't know if it is the wind of Wisdom or the wind of folly, but when we are rooted in our faith we are protected and guided by the Almighty.

Peace (Shalom)